

# The TH Interview: Jill Litwin, Owner, Peas of Mind

by Collin Dunn, Seattle on 02.15.07

TH EXCLUSIVES (the th interview)



Jill Litwin is the owner of [Peas of Mind](#), a company dedicated to improving kids' health through organic, wholesome foods. Peas of Mind makes "Puffets," small, hand-held casseroles that help health-conscious parents who want to feed their toddlers delicious meals with organic ingredients, but don't have the time to make them from scratch. The company was founded on the idea that as toddlers begin eating solid foods, the tastes and textures they experience will shape their eating habits for a lifetime; each homemade recipe is

specifically designed for the growing needs of young ones, and the unique combination of ingredients provides a balanced nutritional meal that is easy to prepare and easy to eat with little hands. TreeHugger recently caught up with Jill to chat with her about organic foods, healthy kids and getting the "peace of mind" that comes with eating healthy and well.

**TreeHugger: A previous article that featured you and Peas of Mind was titled "How Pie Will Change the World?". Do you think puffets can change the world?**

Jill Litwin: Yes, I would like to think Peas of Mind can help change the world in a positive way. It's frustrating to see so many children are growing up overweight and being diagnosed with diabetes at such a young age. We hope to combat poor health by giving parents healthy, fun, easy alternatives to what's currently available, so they can teach their kids how to eat and enjoy healthy food at a young age.

Peas of Mind is an organic frozen food company for growing kids. Our products are called Puffets, which are essentially mini-casseroles. Each Puffet contains organic ingredients, which include the healthiest parts of the food pyramid. The recipes were created with a nutritionist to make sure that each bite has optimal nutrition.

**TH: Obviously, you're a huge fan of organic food (using lots of organic ingredients in Peas of Mind products), but it seems that Peas of Mind was at least partially inspired by your experience with local farmer's markets as a child. Where do you stand on the "organic vs. local" food debate?**

JL: I am a huge fan of both organic and local! The best scenario is a product that is both organic and locally made or grown.

Personally, I try to buy as many organic products that I can, because my taste buds can definitely taste a difference, and my body just feels cleaner! When I am unable to buy organic than I almost always choose the local brand. To me, good health and good nutrition is the bottom line.

As an owner of a food business, I try to follow the same rule of thumb. I work with as many local organic companies that I can.



**TH: Besides your products, what would you recommend parents feed their youngsters to be as healthy and planet-friendly as possible?**

JL: When it comes to feeding a family, I think there are some important things to consider: is it nutritious? Does it taste good? Is it age appropriate? Is it convenient? And will they like it?

In California we are so lucky because we have the ability to get amazing products that are basically grown in our backyards. When you can buy seasonal produce, the difference in taste is incredible and you don't need any preparation. For example, a tomato

in July doesn't need much more than a knife to cut it and a plate to serve it on. Or, give your kids a kumquat right now and they'll think you've been shopping at a candy store! Buying seasonally means pure, fresh, delicious tastes, with all the convenience.

If you live in a climate where seasonal ingredients are more difficult to come by, then a great option is to purchase frozen products! Freezing locks in the flavor and nutrients. That's what we want to offer at Peas of Mind.

**TH: Operating a small business with environmental ethics can make for a lot of trade-offs, I imagine. For example, to grow your business, you began shipping your products around the country instead of just having them available in local stores; this allows you to sell more product, but also causes more carbon dioxide to be emitted and increased your company's ecological footprint. How do you balance business growth and environmental and health concerns?**

Great question! This is where I stand on "environment vs. local". Peas of Mind has a TerraPass, and TerraPass is a local business who we support! A TerraPass donates my funds to clean energy projects like wind farms to compensate for our CO2 emissions. (*Ed. -- see more about TerraPass [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).*)

Both are in the forefront in my mind. I think in running my own business, I have to juggle in my head all the areas of business, whether it's finance or marketing or whatever. My brain focuses on the all; I think everything is an ongoing thing, so making the right decisions for that moment isn't good enough; it's making the right decisions that are good for the long run, as well, which can definitely be tricky. For me, health is really the bottom line. In creating the formulas and coming up with new recipes, I'm always thinking about health. It's about the fusion of ingredients; lots of times, fusing ingredients together produces an even greater health benefit, so that part of my business is really important to me, but there's more to it than that. I think there's this stigma where organic has to be for wealthy people, and Peas of Mind has donated a lot of food to a childcare center in a low-income area in San Francisco, so hopefully we can continue to do that. So, we do what we can, but at the same time, it's a business, and we have to stay afloat, and we're a new business, so it's not like we have a lot of funds to just kind of throw around.

**TH: You raise an interesting question about how organics are perceived. How do you think we can get more people to not only understand the benefits of organic food, but get it out there to people who wouldn't ordinarily even think about buying them?**

JL: I would say that's kind of been taken out of my hands, you know. Like with Wal-Mart having a whole organic campaign and section in their huge grocery stores, I think that it's happening. Whether it comes from sustainable, organic farmers or promoters or advocates like TreeHugger or whoever, it's definitely coming from big business. In a way, I think that's a positive thing, and in a way I think it's a negative thing. To me, I think of Peas of Mind and the food that I can offer, and as long as goes to a child and can benefit them, that's important. I try to have that end consumer in mind, and it's anybody between the ages of 12 months and 4 years and I want to offer Peas of Mind wherever I can get that child to eat good food...almost. But I believe that it's happening, regardless, and it's just the movement that's really happening right now.

**TH: When it comes to eating more sustainably, what would you recommend for adults?**

JL: I think that the more fresh food you can get, the better. Fresh ingredients don't need a lot of work. Today, time is just so sensitive. People are working longer, commutes are longer, and people are tired at the end of the day and don't have a lot of energy to purchase ingredients and make a feast. And fresh doesn't have to just mean vegetables and fruit; there are lots of wonderful local cheesemakers and farmers who deserve our support. If you can eat an ingredient that's in season, I think that's an important thing. It doesn't really need a lot of preparation because it tastes so good already. If not, there's so many companies right now making prepared food so much better, in the frozen food section. I'm a big advocate of frozen foods. The stigma of the freezer has definitely changed, and so I'm lucky that I came in when I did, two years ago. I feel like Amy's Kitchen, another frozen food company, were really the pioneers for healthy frozen food, and they definitely paved the way. It's no longer just TV dinners that you can buy that are just loaded with chemicals and fake ingredients.

**TH: Where do you see sustainable food production and eating going in the future?**

JL: I definitely think the pendulum swings from side to side. We're kind of reaching the side where it's in abundance, but at the same time, groceries stores are certainly expanding their frozen food sections, but space is limited, and that's something that, as a frozen food company, I run up against a lot. I think that the pendulum is beginning to swing toward local – it's definitely going to be the next thing. It sort of brings thing back to this small, almost tangible, local companies. You can get behind the, their story, and their accessible. For me, whether this brand is nationwide or just in the Bay Area, I think that it will always feel local to me. I'm always going to keep that mentality of being accessible and being the one who can answer questions. I get a slew of questions every week, from people writing in to the Peas of Mind website, asking questions about the products, or wanting to know the full nutritionals, or inquiring if we'll be in Park Slope Co-Op, in New York, and I love answering those emails and I hope it's something I can always do.

**TH: Do you think you'd consider expanding your brand to include food for everyone, instead of food designed for toddlers?**

JL: I like to keep my options open, but, for the time being, I feel like we can fend for ourselves. I want to help out these parents right now, who need some help by the end of the day. It all started with one friend, and I love that it all started that way, with this friend that had a toddler. I worked with her, and her husband worked, and so at the end of the day she was so tired that she would literally open a can of green beans and that's what she'd feed her son, and I can't forget that's how it started. That really has more of an impact on the brand: that we're growing kids right now. I definitely want to expand the product line and try other products, besides Puffets, like healthy snack foods. I think there's enough out there for adults, and I'm definitely the type of person that likes to be creative and likes to do something a little against the grain that's not already out there, and I've always lived my life that way, so that's probably what I'll continue to do. Every day is a new different experience, and it's a lot of fun, and we're working so hard at it, and every decision that I make is a thoughtful one. We're juggling all these different areas, between business and issues and politics, and we're making the best decision.

**TH: If you had a magic wand, and could change one behavior for everyone on the planet, what would that be?**

JL: Litter comes in many forms: garbage, gun shells, snide remarks... I would remove *all* the litter from the world!