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Oklahoma food entrepreneur zests up kitchen pantries

By Kylee Willard, FAPC Communications Graduate Assistant

(Stillwater, Okla. – January 23, 2012) The sweet and spicy zing of Suan’s Scotch Bonnet Pepper Jelly concocted by Suan Grant of Oklahoma City captivates consumers’ taste buds on anything from fruit and vegetables to glazed meat.

“The unique and unforgettable flavor of scotch bonnet pepper jelly is a must have in every pantry,” Grant said.

Grant became fond of cooking with the appetizing jelly while living in Montego Bay, Jamaica, working for Project H.O.P.E. as a medical records consultant for Cornwall Regional Hospital.

“Scotch bonnet pepper jelly is used in almost every kitchen on the island and throughout the Caribbean,” she said.

It was not until 2009 that Grant took on the challenge of producing the condiment.

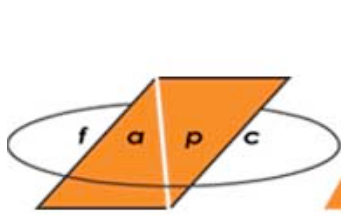
“For many years, I have been making the jelly for family and friends, but it was not until 2009 that I decided to bottle and sell it,” Grant said.

In search of assistance with her new jelly venture, Grant contacted her local extension office, which referred her to Oklahoma State University’s Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center. Grant then attended the FAPC’s Basic Training workshop for Oklahoma food business entrepreneurs to gain knowledge in business planning, market identification and food processing regulations.

“The best thing I could have done was participate in the FAPC seminar,” Grant said. “I attribute Suan’s Foods success today to taking that course and the support of the FAPC.”

Grant has worked closely with Erin Johnson, FAPC business and marketing client coordinator and Suan’s Foods project leader, and other FAPC personnel on product scale-up, sensory testing, cost evaluations, shelf-life studies, product placement, and media and promotions.

“By following the steps of the FAPC’s client success path, Suan has set her product apart from the competition,” Johnson said. “She is always looking for new and innovative ways to get her product into consumers’ homes.”



Since January 2011, Grant, along with two other FAPC clients, has featured products in the Oklahoma Gourmet booth at The Gourmet Market in Dallas, Texas.

Oklahoma Gourmet is a newly formed group representing the FAPC and Made in Oklahoma program, which features Oklahoma food entrepreneurs, said Andrea Graves, FAPC business and marketing specialist and lead on the project.

“Oklahoma Gourmet is a stepping stone for Oklahoma food entrepreneurs to take that leap into becoming more than just a small business,” Graves said. “This opportunity to display products helps FAPC clients receive exposure from small boutiques to large retailers such as Bass Pro Shops, Macy’s and Neiman Marcus.”

Grant said the presence at the Dallas Gourmet Market is certainly important in the growth of her company.

During the January gourmet food exhibition, the Oklahoma City company took home the coveted 2011 Gourmet Market Gold Award surpassing the competition in the Best Condiment: Jelly/Jams/Preserves category with her scotch bonnet pepper jelly in the areas of taste, originality and packaging.

“I was absolutely thrilled to be acknowledged and awarded for my product,” Grant said. “I cannot express how honored I feel to have my product liked and endorsed in this way.”

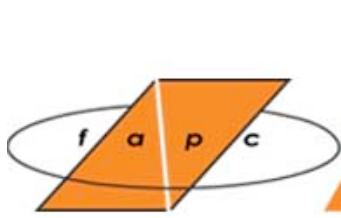
As a result of her exposure at The Gourmet Market, Suan’s Foods received national recognition as Editor’s Choice in the prestigious Fancy Food & Culinary Products magazine in February 2011. Later, the prized jelly was the April 2011 front cover feature and the “What’s New, What’s Hot” specialty food in the May 2011 issue of the magazine.

“It is quite an honor as a first time exhibitor to be recognized with such awards,” Graves said. “This is just one example of a ripple effect for a start-up company such as Suan’s.”

Since inception of the scotch bonnet pepper jelly, Grant has expanded her product-line with a sweet tomato jam and relish. Currently, the meat, poultry, fish, fruit and vegetable condiments are retailed at more than 75 specialty shops nationwide including three Whole Foods stores in Oklahoma and Arkansas, and available for purchase online at www.suansfoods.com.

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