

Bakery Barn Mixes its High-Protein Cookies into the Market

Pittsburgh Business Times - November 29, 2002 by [Tracy Carbasho](#)

A local weight lifter's craving for a tasty protein-packed cookie has taken him from the gym into the kitchen.

"I learned everything I could about the commercial production of traditional baked goods by doing research and calling companies like Mrs. Fields and Famous Amos," said Sean Perich, president and founder of Bakery Barn Inc. in Baldwin.

A Duquesne University graduate and former KPMG accountant who currently works as a consultant for Downtown professional services firm of Jefferson Wells International, Mr. Perich sees his lack of baking experience as a plus.

"The biggest advantage I had was that I knew nothing about baking. I was able to think outside the box and figure out what should work."

Mr. Perich, 34, blew up a mixer when he tried to make his first batch of protein-fortified chocolate chip cookies at his apartment in August 2000. For the next nine months, he experimented with new ingredients and kept improving the protein cookies, which he "tested" on family members and friends at a local gym.

A weight lifter since age 16, Mr. Perich was accustomed to eating sports nutrition bars in order to increase his daily intake of protein. However, he never found one that pleased his palate. Starting Bakery Barn was his way of meeting not only his own dietary needs, but also those of sports enthusiasts.

After getting a thumbs-up on the taste, Mr. Perich knew he was ready to take his baking to the level of commercial production. He put together more than \$200,000 to start the business through a line of credit, personal financing and financial assistance from his father. He leased a 4,000-square-foot building in May 2001 and began purchasing equipment.

Bakery Barn started with chocolate chip, toffee bit, peanut butter chip and butterscotch chip as its original flavors. The cookies, which sell for \$2.49 each, are made with whey protein, which Mr. Perich said has the highest rated commercially available protein.

Though the price might seem high for cookies that weigh 3 to 3.5 ounces, Mr. Perich compares their cost to that of nutritional energy bars, which he said generally run between \$2 and \$3. He said each cookie contains about 48 percent of the recommended daily allowance of protein, which is equivalent to six ounces of chicken breast or a can of tuna fish.

Although production did not officially get under way until early January, the company expects to finish 2002 with just under \$400,000 in gross revenue. Mr. Perich forecasts he'll hit about \$1 million in revenue for 2003.

He hopes to be profitable by next year's first quarter and is working to obtain national accounts with supplement stores and fitness centers, using a network of distributors to sell to gyms and stores in 40 states and Canada.

NEW COOKIES IN WORKS

Two new lines were launched this summer. Extreme cookies, designed for the hardcore athlete, and the Lean line, which offers fewer carbohydrates, less sugar, fat and calories than the original cookie.

Bakery Barn is conducting research on other high-protein items, which may be offered in the future, including muffins, scones, oatmeal-based cookies, iced cookies and granola bars.

Joe Holden, vice president of sales and marketing, said Bakery Barn is finalizing plans to make sugar-free cookies that would be sold under the private label name SuperPro, a New Jersey-based company created by National Hockey League player Krzysztof Oliwa. Mr. Oliwa previously played for the Penguins and is now a member of the New York Rangers.

SourceCF, an Alabama-based company that specializes in products for cystic fibrosis patients, has asked Bakery Barn to create a line of cookies that meet the nutritional requirements of CF patients.

Bill Aikins, local director of sales for SourceCF, said the company was looking for a product with a high-calorie intake and nutritional value. SourceCF will begin marketing the cookies early next year. He said cystic fibrosis patients and nutritionists throughout the country are currently doing tests on the cookies and the feedback has been positive.

Mr. Holden said Bakery Barn is also considering a cookie line for individuals with diabetes.

Bakery Barn's first distributor was American Body Building Products, which has a local office in Pleasant Hills. Tom Wright, a distributor for ABB, wanted to sell the cookies after giving them a test run at the 2001 Mr. Pittsburgh body building competition.

"The cookies are one of our top-selling products," said Mr. Wright. "We sell a couple hundred dozen each week."

Mr. Perich said he is not aware of a domestic competitor that produces baked goods with such a high-protein content. However, Bakery Barn does compete with large companies, like the Florida-based MET-Rx, which produces sports nutrition supplements.

Bakery Barn will crank out about 250,000 cookies this year, and expects to at least double that number next year.