

Indiana Business Sells 375 Flavors Of Popcorn

Ask for any flavor of popcorn, and Carole Buck will likely figure out how to make it. Kahlua and cream, strawberry shortcake, and macaroni and cheese are just 3 of the 375 flavored popcorns she offers through her business, Not Just Popcorn.

Buck was employed at the business in 1989 when the owner decided to sell out. At 50, her friends thought she was crazy, but she thought the business was fun and took it over. Nearly 25 years later, she still runs it, working seven days a week.

Her two-building business is located in the small town of Edinburgh, Ind., which always smells like whatever flavored popcorn is being made. The retail store has 75 to 80 flavors on the shelves, and Buck's crew custom-makes whatever flavors are ordered.

She describes the hands-on process as similar to mixing cement. The flavoring ingredients are heated and mixed together, then the popped corn is added and everything is tossed around to coat every

piece of popcorn.

When bagged, the flavored popcorn has a shelf life of about 45 days for savory flavors to two months for most other flavors. Traditional caramel popcorn is the most popular, with Chicago Mix (real cheese) right behind. The third place top choice is dill pickle. And of course, the chocolate varieties rank pretty high.

"We get our flavor ideas from our customers," Buck says. "The only one I refused was a request for Copenhagen chewing tobacco flavor."

She has been surprised how well some odd flavors came out—such as catsup and beer, and liquor-flavored varieties.

Not Just Popcorn caters to special events like weddings, showers, birthdays and holiday parties with custom blends of colors and flavors. It offers packages for corporate gifts and fundraising programs. And it sells popcorn in a wide variety of collectable tins (1, 2, 3 1/2 and 6 1/2 gal.) that include all the major sports logos.



Photo courtesy, AgriNews Publications

Carole Buck's retail store has 75 to 80 different popcorn flavors on the shelves. She can also custom-make whatever flavors you order.

The business has many loyal customers who buy a tin of popcorn and then enjoy half price refills after that—simply by mentioning they have a tin when they call in an order.

Many first-time customers buy the Sampler Box, which Buck calls the "hooker" because people get hooked once they try it. It sells for \$18 and includes 10 bags of the most popular varieties.

Located just 30 miles from Indianapolis, Not Just Popcorn is a popular tourist attraction. Visitors can take a short free tour or book ahead for a 45-min., \$2 tour.

"We do a lot of tours for bus groups,

schools, boys and girls clubs and church groups. We had one bus group from Alaska," Buck says.

"I would like everyone to come and see us for themselves," she adds. "We have a good product, and our staff is friendly."

If you can't make it, check out the website and call. Not Just Popcorn ships all over the world.

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Couple Opens An On-Farm Distillery

A few years ago, Mike Swanson and his wife, Cheri Reese, were like many big city couples, immersed in jobs and riding out a tough economic climate. "We were doing okay," Mike says, "but our heart was set on doing something different at our farm."

As they contemplated different ideas, Mike enrolled in classes at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. There, while completing his MBA, he wrote a business plan for a distillery.

"My professor liked the idea so well he encouraged me to make it happen, so that's what we're doing," Swanson says. In the fall of 2013, the couple will brew their first batches of whiskey, gin and rum from their on-farm distillery known as Far North Spirits. "Our goal is to use the skill and knowledge we've acquired over the years to create a field-to-glass farming model, a concept that dates back to the time my great grandfather Gustav settled his farm in northern Minnesota," Mike says.

As they planned, organized and developed the business model over 3 years, the couple learned that having an idea is the easiest part of starting a business. Swanson first had to learn how to operate a distillery. He did that by studying books, attending conferences and training with distillers in Wisconsin, Chicago and Denver. After arranging financing, gathering permits and lining up a distributor, they started construction on the 9,000 sq. ft. distillery and tasting room in the spring of 2013. "We're about 25 miles from Canada and less than that from North Dakota," Swanson says with pride. "We're the northernmost distiller in the United States."

Late in the fall of 2013 they'll begin producing three Scandinavian-themed spirits called Solweig Gin, Ålander Spiced Rum and Roknar Rye Whiskey. Within the first year, they hope to produce about 4,700 cases of spirits. Gin and rum will roll off the bottling line in November, followed by whiskey, which

requires a longer aging process.

"The basis for distilling is cooking, and I've always loved that, so this has been a great adventure," Mike says. He personally experimented with different ingredients and different formulations to develop their first spirit formulations. His college degrees in biology and chemistry have helped him understand the distilling process and how to produce quality products. Swanson and Reese say their company will be one of only 5 U.S. distillers to grow their own ingredients. They produce corn, barley and rye on their farm. They will ship in other ingredients such as sugar cane from a family relative in Louisiana, lemons, juniper berries and botanicals. The couple's farm is surrounded by an endless expanse of cropland that may eventually produce grains for their distillery if they need it.

"We're basically right in the middle of our raw material," Swanson says, "and that definitely is an economic advantage." Although Far North is geographically a long way from highly populated areas, they've lined up a distributor to deliver their custom-formulated and cleverly named spirits into the Midwest marketplace. "There's a demand for new, unique and high-quality craft spirits at liquor stores, bars and restaurants where local and sustainable products are promoted," says Swanson. They hope to join other companies from the region such as Polaris, Arctic Cat, Marvin Windows, Steiger and Bobcat who started small and eventually grew into strong and popular brands.

Swanson says they'll have close to \$1.5 million invested in their business before the first spirits are produced, but he's confident of success. Cheri, who handles the website and marketing, says, "We've had great, positive feedback and are excited to get our first spirits out the door."

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Olive Industry Grows With Demand For U.S. Oil

Two years ago FARM SHOW published a story about Kevin Shaw who was working diligently to establish olives as a viable crop on Georgia farmland (Vol. 36, No. 2). There were hundreds if not thousands of naysayers who poo-pooed the idea, but as the calendar flips to 2014, Georgia Olive Farms (GOV) is still growing strong.

In 2011 the group harvested 4 tons of ripe olives from 14 acres of trees and quickly shipped them via refrigerated truck 1,000 miles to a Texas mill for processing. The cool ride was needed to keep the crop from fermenting before it was processed. In 2013 they harvested several hundred tons and processed them in their own facility. The oil from Georgia Olive Farms has excellent flavor and outstanding quality, according to a taste expert who called it "sweet, smooth and soft".

"Olive production is a marathon," says Kevin. "The trees start producing in the third year and don't reach peak production until year 7." At that time revenue might be \$1,000 to \$3,000 an acre, but only after nearly \$10,000 an acre has gone into developing the trees, which are planted 6 ft. apart with about 600 to an acre.

Other farmers are adding olive production slowly, but the partners feel many are watching GOF to see how 2013 production turns out. GOF co-owner Berrien Sutton thinks that by 2015 there will be 6 more productive orchards and by 2018 olives could be produced on 2,000 acres, with steady growth beyond. In the meantime, GOF continues to help others enter the olive industry by propagating trees, gaining knowledge through industry associations and willingly sharing with interested growers. Similar stories appear from other areas of the South, especially Texas, where olives are "the new oil boom".

Jim Henry started the olive industry in Texas back in the early 1990's, and today his Texas Olive Ranch produces 2 Spanish varieties and one Greek variety of olives. The company is planting a 300,000-tree orchard near Victoria. Oils they produce now are processed into several flavors available from the company online and from several retailers in central and south Texas.



Georgia Olive Farms harvested several hundred tons of olives this year and processed them in their own facility.

In 2009 another family operation, Central Texas Olive Ranch, planted 23,000 trees. Since then Owner Curtis Mickan and his grandson Josh Swafford have planted close to 500,000 trees for growers in Central Texas and have another 110,000 contracted for 2014. Swafford estimates the cost for trees, land work, irrigation and planting at about \$7,500 an acre, but people aren't deterred. That's because growers in the U.S. are determined to hold quality standards at the highest level and demand labeling that indicates "extra virgin olive oil". Industry experts are concerned that of the oil imported into the U.S. now, about 70 percent are mislabeled and are not in fact extra virgin, they're a blend of several oils. That ruffles U.S. growers, who vow to maintain high quality standards.

"It's a fascinating business, fast moving and showing great potential," Swafford says. A survey of growers at the olive grower's annual meeting in 2013 indicated that production could increase by 200 percent in the next two years.

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