Kelseyville company's salt-free spices revival



Pat Gage is hoping she can catch lightning in a bottle a second time. Salt-free lightning.

Gage, a Kelseyville resident and self-described serial entrepreneur, is reviving the salt-free spice recipes that she first commercially produced three decades ago in Sonoma County. Her original company, Parsley Patch, was successful enough that global spice manufacturer McCormick & Co. purchased the business in 1987.

Now, Gage and her family are reviving recipes like “Garlicsaltless,” one of the Parsley Patch’s more popular blends. But this time, their two-year-old company, Engage Organics, is bottling spices that not only are sodium free, but also organic, gluten free and non-GMO.

The company’s products are featured online and in more than 100 Bay Area stores, Gage said

Engage Organics touts not only the health benefits but also the flavor of its nine blends — soon to be 11 varieties.

“It makes things taste so good,” said Gage, “and you don’t have to know how to season things.”

Along with Gage, the family business includes her husband, Jon Gage, son Jason Sherwood and nephew Jeremy Fitzpatrick.

Gage was a single mother named Pat Sherwood in 1980 when she teamed up with Elizabeth Bertani to start Parsley Patch. The two women, both Sonoma State University students, took out student loans in order to launch the business.

Their products drew considerable interest when they debuted at a 1981 food trade show.

A September 2012 Vegetarian Times story noted that the young company then was selling its products in 25 states. The blends were showing up in such diverse places as the Neiman-Marcus Spring Catalogue and the Pritikin Longevity Center in Santa Monica.

In 1984, Bertani sold her stake in the company to Jon Gage, an owner in a specialty foods brokerage that was marketing Parsley Patch. Pat Sherwood and Jon Gage married that same year.

In 1987, the Gages sold their business to McCormick, today a 125-year-old company with more than 10,000 employees. The couple went on to found other companies, including an athletic club and spa in Park City, Utah, and a soy beverage business targeting women.

“This is my fifth startup,” Gage said.

She and her husband decided to revive their spice recipes after watching the demise of all their original blends, especially Garlicsaltless, which she said she continued to depend on for her own cooking. Her inability to purchase it caused her to “get the message” about the need to revive their blends.

The family began Engage Organics in early 2012.

While the business is based in Kelseyville, it manufactures its spice blends at an organic farm near Potter Valley in Mendocino County and ships product from a warehouse in Santa Rosa.

The family is able to use the original recipes, which can’t be trademarked, Gage said.

What’s different today is that the company can use certified organic ingredients, as well as those that are gluten free and certified free of genetically modified organisms. Those qualities make Engage Organics different and more appealing to certain consumers, especially millennials.

“They’re very food savvy,” Gage said. “I salute them for wanting to know what’s in their food.”

Before the sale, Parsley Patch had a 33 percent market share of natural, sodium-free spice blends in the U.S., Gage said. That’s her family’s goal with Engage Organics.

To reach that goal, the owners want to expand into more natural food stores in the western U.S.

In Sonoma County, the spice blends can be found at Oliver’s Markets, Sonoma Market, Big John’s Market, Molsberry Market, Pacific Market, Fiesta Market and Raley’s supermarkets.

At Oliver’s Market on Montecito Boulevard, store manager Frank Camilleri said Engage Organics has done in-store demonstrations “and customers just love it.”

Taste is often lacking with salt-free spice blends, Camilleri said, “where this really enhances the product you put it on.”

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* All-Purpose can be used in all recipes instead of salt. It’s flavor is “Bottled Magic!”

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* Most Lemon Peppers contain salt and sugar to deliver the sweet-sour notes of flavor. Engage Organics’
* Lemon Pepper is salt-free and sugar-free.
* The flavor is fresh and healthy. You won’t compromise your health in order to get the lemon-pepper hit you crave.
* Lemon Pepper leaves a healthy melt-in-your-mouth sensation on everything.

**Sweet Cinn**

* Cinnamon’s high anti-oxidant properties have the same antioxidant-healthy-benefits as blueberries.
* Use Sweet-Cinn in your morning coffee to get the cholesterol-lowering benefits of cinnamon.
* A great sugar substitute that adds a kick to cereals, yogurt, and oatmeal.

**Mexi-Mix**

* You won’t need those expensive taco seasoning packets with Mexi-Mix in the cupboard.
* Just 1 tsp. turns tacos, burritos, salsas, and beans and rice into taste-tempting treats.
* Mexi-Mix is the “secret” ingredients in chili cook-off contests.
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