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## Startup Spotlight: Get Real Foods and the search for the perfect cookie

By Phil Hall - September 13, 2021

Three years ago, longtime friends Lauren Berger and Marla Felton were having a dinner party with their respective families and assorted friends. When the time came to serve dessert, things became a wee bit chaotic.



*Lauren Berger, left, and Marla Felton, co-founders of Get Real Foods. Photo by Tyler Sizemore*

"We realized that we were putting out different desserts for someone who was dairy free, someone who was gluten free, someone who was grain free, someone who couldn't eat refined sugar," Berger said.

"And Marla's husband said, 'This is crazy, we should be able to have one dessert that we can all eat and we can all like.'"

To Berger's surprise, Felton's husband, Greg, volunteered her for a solution.

"He was like, 'Lauren, you used to make cookies. Why don't you try and make us a cookie that we can all eat?'"

Berger had previously run a small cookie company called City Girl Country Girl. Prior to that she did product marketing for Godiva Chocolate and Pepperidge Farm, but left the food trade to raise her children and later took on the job of managing a Greenwich yoga studio.

Felton had no food-trade experience — she was a former litigator who founded the Greenwich nonprofit Connecticut Circles, but her daughter had food allergies and she was eager to find a dessert solution that would satisfy her sweet tooth without creating adverse reactions.

Together, the pair began a series of trial-and-error tests to find a cookie recipe that could bypass all dietary concerns and still taste wonderful.

“Every time I baked, I would bring stuff over to Marla and Greg and then they would try it,” Berger continued. “Then they would take the recipe and bake it and make some adjustments. And basically, we would go back and forth for quite a long time, just having fun doing it trying to find a cookie that we could all eat.”

Eventually, friends and family members were recruited to taste-test the cookies, with Berger saying they finally hit the bull’s-eye “when we finally got a recipe that every single person liked, whether it was someone who had a food sensitivity or no food sensitivity at all.”

Felton pointed out that while they were perfecting their recipes, they also “tasted everything in the market” to judge whether their results could compete with the commercially available cookies.

“We really didn’t like any of them,” Felton said. “We didn’t feel that they tasted as good as a delicious homemade cookie.”

Berger and Felton decided to take their cookie recipes public via Get Real Foods, a startup Greenwich company offering the REAL Cookies brand.

“Once we came up with the recipe and we perfected the recipe, we then moved on to our packaging and other things that we thought can make the cookie super successful in the marketplace,” Felton said.

The key to their future success, Berger said, was creating a commercially packaged item that replicated the taste of a fresh-baked cookie.



"There are a lot of things out there that look like a cookie but don't taste like a cookie," she said. "We only use ingredients that are good for you. And if you look at our ingredient list, it is very small and very simple.

"And the base of our products is almond flour," she said. "We use almond flour and coconut flour and put a lot of thought into every single ingredient. We sweeten our cookies with maple syrup — some of the other companies are using brown rice syrup or tapioca starch and those are super sugars that are kind of fillers."

The REAL Cookies brand is kosher, vegan-friendly, paleo-friendly, gluten-free, grain-free and dairy-free. The cookies measure approximately three inches in diameter and the product line was launched with three flavors: chocolate chip, peanut butter chocolate chip and lemon blueberry.

"Lemon blueberry tastes like a blueberry muffin," Felton said. "You can almost eat it all day long — I think Marla and I both eat it for breakfast every day. And even if I'm going to have my green shake, I have my lemon blueberry cookie with it because every ingredient is healthy and because the base is almonds, which is high in protein and gives you sustained energy."

Berger and Felton are now selling their REAL Cookies through their company's website at \$3.49 per two-cookie pack and are in ongoing talks with retail chains to put their products in grocery aisles. The pair also is readying additional flavors for release once their retail presence is established.

"We have more in our wheelhouse that we want to bring," Felton said. "We tested probably eight different flavors, so we have more good ones coming up."