

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Apple recipe spreads joy and business for Southern Okie

What will I do with all these apples?

Too much of a good thing was the dilemma facing Gina Hollingsworth. The overflowing supply of apples in her refrigerator needed to be used before they turned rotten. She baked apple cakes, muffins and everything she could think of before finally concocting a recipe for gourmet apple spread.

Hollingsworth knew she had a winning recipe when she couldn't keep up with demand at local craft shows and fairs. That's when she realized she had a new business on her hands.

She decided to call her business Southern Okie to blend her Kentucky roots with love of her newly-adopted state of Oklahoma. Both have been important to her success.

Hollingsworth grew up with a tradition of great cooking and Southern hospitality. She added marketing savvy and a love of people to sell gourmet spreads in Edmond, then at the State Fair of Oklahoma, and now, the world.

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) helped Southern Okie get established as a Made In Oklahoma company. This program promotes locally made products at state fairs and area grocery stores. ODAFF's international marketing program helped Hollingsworth meet international buyers and move to a world stage.

Hollingsworth has participated in two trade missions sponsored by ODAFF and has made valuable connections in foreign countries that want to import her original gourmet apple spread. They also love her peach, pumpkin and pear spreads.

A recent in-bound trade mission brought buyers from Mexico to Oklahoma City. They sampled MIO products and considered making them available in Mexican stores and restaurants. The trade mission was a partnership between ODAFF and the Southern U.S. Trade Association (SUSTA) which promotes the export of U.S. agricultural products.

The buyer from Mexican food service company Salud Y Sabor was impressed by the freshness of ingredients used in Southern Okie products. He told Hollingsworth that his company never compromises on quality.

"I think about what I can do for him and his business," said Hollingsworth. "He wanted to know what kind of business relationship we would have if he imported Southern Okie products."

During the trade mission, Hollingsworth met with four buyers and developed strong leads for future sales. ODAFF's international marketing team has decades of experience in matching Oklahoma companies with appropriate contacts from other countries.

“SUSTA and ODAFF have been instrumental in guiding me through the process as I have grown my business. I am thankful for their support and their willingness to help not only Southern Okie but all Oklahoma based businesses,” Hollingsworth said.

ODAFF’s programs and services are open to all Oklahoma companies interested in selling their agricultural value-added products to the world. Value-added products and companies contribute to the health of the state’s economy and the agriculture sector.

“Southern Okie has more than tripled in sales the past two years. With this exceptional growth, I am hoping to expand my product line as well as hire another employee,” said Hollingsworth.

To meet Hollingsworth and purchase a signed copy of her first cookbook, visit the Made In Oklahoma Tasting Event hosted by Gourmet Gallery in the Shoppes at Northpark, 122nd and N. May Ave., Oklahoma City on Saturday, August 22 from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

To find out if ODAFF can help your business, contact Barbara Charlet at barbara.charlet@ag.ok.gov or Haidar Haidary at haidar.haidary@ag.ok.gov.

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Photo caption: Gina Hollingsworth, owner of Southern Okie Gourmet Spreads, talks business with a Mexican buyer and translator at an in-bound trade mission sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture and the Southern U.S. Trade Association.

