

BOHEMIAN

NORTH BAY



Flood Flash

Even as the Napa River rises, flood-control funds slow to a trickle. Where have they all gone? Hello, Iraq. Gary Brady-Herndon reports p9

FOOD & DRINK



To Market, to Market

Launching a new food product isn't easy, but LaLoo's Goat's Milk Ice Cream is beating the odds one flavor at a time

By HEATHER IRWIN

Each year, between 12,000 and 16,000 new food products are introduced in the United States. The vast majority are well-planned launches by established household brands like Nabisco or Frey's, companies with access to multimillion-dollar marketing campaigns and easy distribution to large grocery chains. Despite these behemoth efforts, however, at least a quarter of them—often more—won't survive the first year.

The odds become distinctly slimmer for small businesses and individuals trying to break into an already saturated market, as local food-launch hopeful Laura Howard has discovered. Without an established brand name or a megabudget, an estimated 89 percent of small food-product businesses will fail, leaving only the slimmest number of success stories. Howard is one of those successes—so far.

A former movie producer, Howard launched her LaLoo's Goat's Milk Ice Cream last year from a newly acquired Sonoma County farm. Although she'd barely broken in her boots, Howard had put the farm up as collateral for a business loan just months earlier, banking on the fact that goat's milk ice cream might be the next big thing in food. With flavors like Black Mission Fig, Strawberry Darling (made with balsamic vinegar) and Chèvre Chiffon, it was a gamble.

Howard had been making creatively flavored goat's milk ice cream at home for friends and co-workers for several years with wild success. It started on what the former Angelino calls a "cleansing journey with my body and health." Blame it on her yoga instructor. Howard gave up all dairy foods except for goat's milk, thought by many to have incredible health benefits because of its unique physical properties. With significantly smaller milk-fat globules (a fancy way of describing its composition), goat's milk is more easily digested by humans than is cow's milk.

Because it was both healthy (or at least healthier than cow's milk) and tasted pretty dang good, Howard knew she had a potential winner on her hands. Learning that the ice cream market in the United States is a \$20 billion a year industry and fairly certain that she had a virtual monopoly in making it from goat's milk, Howard had the seed of an idea that she could make a business work. It would take a trip to Italy to plant it firmly in her mind.

The 'Aha!' Moment

While shooting a documentary overseas a few years ago, Howard met an Italian cheese maker whose life seemed pretty darn idyllic. "She had this gorgeous life. She had goats and made this product that made people happy. It was a quality thing she was putting out in the world," Howard remembers. "She was breathing fresh air and just loving life. I thought, 'This is what life should be about.'" Not long after, Howard

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LaLoo's
GOAT'S MILK ICE CREAM COMPANY