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**FIRST
LOCAL FLAVOR**
FOOD WITH A REGIONAL
FLAIR CAN LURE LOYAL LOCALS
AS WELL AS FANS FROM AFAR.

BY NICHOLE L. TORRES

After a friend sent Donna Dockins a box of New Zealand dukkah, a traditional blend of crushed hazelnuts and spices used as a dip, her regional food business was born. This Portland, Oregon, resident loved the flavor, and realizing that hazelnuts were one of Oregon's most prolific exports, she decided to create Oregon Dukkah. "I loved the idea of using a local food crop," says Dockins.

To launch, she sought guidance from the state Department of Agriculture and Or-



"I loved the idea of using a local food crop," says Donna Dockins of her regional business.



regon State University, two entities that were jointly looking to promote and develop Oregon food products. Months of market research followed as Dockins learned the ins and outs of food product development, processing, packaging and distribution. Her big coup came at the end of 2004, when she sold her first batch of dukkah at a local farmer's market. "I sold 99 bags in four hours," says Dockins, 46. That initial burst of success motivated

her to approach stores—and soon Whole Foods picked up her product, first locally, then regionally. This year, sales are projected to be in the six figures.

Understanding your point of differentiation in the regional food marketplace is your ticket in, explains Tammy Marquez-Oldham, a counselor for the SBDC and CEO of Marquez Proj-

ect Management. To get your foodie brain flowing, investigate your local farmer's market to see what types of regional foods are popular. "Communities nationwide have farmer's markets, and [they're] a very good way for food entrepreneurs to test the market," she says. "They get the opportunity to talk to their consumers face to face."

And a regional brand doesn't always have to stay regional—you can think bigger, says Marquez-Oldham. The internet allows you to not only do national and international research, but also sell your popular local food product to the masses outside your area. Don't forget the power of your regional roots, though—you can market to locals, tourists and outsiders alike using the unique birthplace of your food product. "In general, today's consumers are very interested in where their food comes from," she notes.

That's exactly how Tushar Dubey, 31, and his wife, Ana, 28, have built their Honolulu bakery. Founding the Hokulani Bake Shop in late 2005, this couple got the idea to market their line of Hawaiian-themed specialty cookies and cupcakes after admiring famous New York City bakeries. With sales approaching \$300,000 this year, Hokulani is now an Oahu tourist destination, and hokulanibakeshop.com is the online destination for out-of-towners craving the sweet Hawaiian creations. Says Tushar, "You build a little niche, and you continue to grow on that."