

South Carolina Department of Agriculture

Hugh Weathers, Commissioner

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Lowcountry Companies represented at Chicago Food Show

CHICAGO – Three Lowcountry companies traveled to Chicago for the Global Food and Style Expo this week increasing their reach into new markets.

The show which ran from April 27-29 is an annual trade show combining the Fancy Foods Show, All Things Organic, and the U.S. Food Export Showcase bringing together vendors and buyers from across the county and world. The Hilton Head companies, Heritage Shortbread, Hilton Head Cookie Company, and Uncle Pete's Barbeque Sauce, were among the 1,000 exhibitors representing almost 56,000 specialty food products.

For Tom Raines, owner of Uncle Pete's Barbeque Sauce in Hilton Head, this was his first food expo. In business for three years, Raines has turned a family recipe for barbeque sauce, developed by his great uncle Pete, into a business using the award winning sauce. He originally began using it in family gatherings and was encouraged to bottle sell his sauce. Raines said he entered, and won, the Hilton Head Kiwanis Club Barbeque and Rib Burn Off three years in a row, and decided to enter his recipe into national barbeque competitions. Raines has consistently won. He recently placed first in the coveted Scovie Awards sponsored by Fiery Foods Magazine and Barbeque.

"We want to stay in the gourmet foods and specialty foods arena," Raines said. "This Expo was the vehicle we needed to expand our market."

Raines said the show helped open doors into an expanded market and helped get exposure with buyers in the Midwest. He currently sells in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Colorado along with Internet sales. His goal is to expand into the Upper Midwest.

"We saw buyers from places like Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin," Raines said.

Heritage Shortbread owner Willow Cole, who has also been in business three years, has turned her mother's recipe for shortbread into a growing business.

Cole, who lives in Bluffton with her husband, says she is interested in exporting into Canada, and expanding into the Midwest and New England's specialty food stores. The expo has allowed her to talk to representatives from the areas she wants to branch into. Cole said the name of her product and tartan ribbon on the box is from her mother's family heritage in Scotland.

Raines and Cole are both scheduled to attend the Fancy Foods Show in New York City on June 29 through July 1.

Jerry and Marcy Elam owners of the Hilton Head Cookie Company had a constant stream of onlookers at the Expo ready to sample their cookies as they came out of the oven.

"It's went very well," said Jerry. "I think this show was even better than last year's."

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Elam said he developed some good leads and inquiries in his product. He is also looking to expand his reach into the Midwest, and Chicago in particular; he said he is interested in talking further with a few distributors he met during the Expo.

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture along with the Southeastern United States Trade Association (SUSTA) of which the Department is a member, partnered to bring six South Carolina companies to Chicago for the Expo.

“It’s important for buyers to get to see these South Carolina companies,” said Aaron Wood, who oversees international marketing for the SC Department of Agriculture. “The feedback we receive is showing these companies are reaching their target audience.”

Wood added the SC Department of Agriculture assists these and other companies in promoting and exporting their products through events like the Global Food and Style Expo.

For more information on the Hilton Head Companies represented in Chicago or to arrange interviews contact: Jerry Elam, Hilton Head Cookie Company, 843-379-5101, Tom Raines, Uncle Pete’s Barbeque Sauce, 877-227-5032, and Willow Cole, Heritage Shortbread, 843-342-7268.

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