



## The “Salsa Sisters” in Bracken County Turn an Old Family Recipe into Red Gold, and Use the Web to Help Them

**Name:**  
McDowell Farms Salsa

**Internet:**  
www.mcdowellfarmssalsa.com

**Products/Services:**  
Food

**Location:**  
Germantown/Bracken County

**Leadership:**  
Carla McDowell & Belinda Fay,  
Co-owners

**Employees:** 2 – with a little help from family members

**Founded:** 2004

**Reach:** Global

**Innovative Insight:** *“To be successful, you need to set reasonable goals and form strong networking systems.”*

**Way Internet Has Made You More Competitive:** *“The Internet has made us a national company instead of a regional one by expanding our market base.”*

**Advice to Growing Companies:** *“Get online. Our sales have tripled since going online. Our webpage has helped us to tell our story and has given our consumers an avenue from which they can purchase our products.”*

**Ways to Maintain Other Competitive Advantages:** *“Increase your product line and join organizations with similar goals.”*

**Germantown, Ky.** – Belinda Fay and Carla McDowell grew up eating home-grown vegetables lovingly canned by their mother, Doris McCormick. So, when she passed away, it just seemed natural for the sisters to use canning as a way to help them heal from their loss.

“Her death was unexpected so canning was a good way to get through the summer,” said McDowell. Using tomatoes grown in their garden, the sisters also began making salsa from an old family recipe.

“We didn’t expect to grow a business from this, but word got around and people started encouraging us to sell our salsa,” said Fay.

After taking the necessary steps, the sisters set up at a local festival where they sold \$2,000 worth of their home-made salsa at one time. “After that, we knew we had a good thing,” said Fay.

Since then, McDowell Farms Salsa has grown from the booths of farmer’s markets and festivals to the shelves of stores across the state of Kentucky, as well as southern Ohio. The salsa comes in four varieties – mild, medium, hot and very hot. They cook their salsa in a state-of-the-art kitchen, purchased in part by a loan Carla and her husband, David, a farmer, qualified for from the Agriculture Development Fund, designed to benefit the hard-hit tobacco farmers. It’s complete with a walk-in refrigerator, commercial six-burner stove and stainless-steel vat. In it, they’re able to make 300 pints of salsa at a time.

They’ve not been at a loss for exposure. The sisters have been showcased on the state-wide production of “Bluegrass and Backgrounds” on RFD-TV and recognized nationally by “America’s Heartland,” a broadcast of PBS.

“We can always tell what part of the country “America’s Heartland” has aired because we’ll get a lot of sales from that area afterwards,” said McDowell. They receive these sales online using another component of their business – the Internet.

The sisters attribute their decision to go online to their children, who had the foresight to realize the importance of having an online presence, provided and maintained by Courika Solutions in Maysville. Fay said it’s hard to calculate, but she estimates that a little over one-fourth of their sales come from online purchases. One thing she knows for certain – business is good.

“The growth that we’ve had this past year has been tremendous,” said Fay. “Our Internet sales have tripled.” Despite this world-wide exposure, the sisters are dedicated to remaining “Kentucky Proud” meaning that all their ingredients are grown and raised in the Commonwealth.

In addition to valuable media coverage, McDowell Farms Salsa also received the 2005 Innovation in Agriculture Award from the Governor’s Office of Agricultural Policy, where they were recognized at a luncheon in Frankfort.

The sisters make certain to note that their success has not come easily. They had to lay a lot of ground work to get their business started, including getting state and federal certifications, participating in extensive training classes, writing a business plan and completing the state loan application, not to mention dedicating long hours in the kitchen.

“Sometimes we are dragging. We’ll leave the kitchen at 8 – 9 o’clock at night,” said McDowell. Still, Fay said there was never a moment they felt like giving up.

McDowell, a school teacher, and Fay a nurse administrator, hope to one day operate the business full-time, but admit they have to do it at their own pace.

The sisters have an ultimate goal of landing on the list of “Oprah’s Favorite Things.” However, they realize they might not be ready for that distinction quite yet.

“Until we get some automation, we have to do this at our own speed,” said McDowell. “We don’t want to take away from the quality and freshness of our salsa.”

It doesn’t hurt to dream though, and they tell this to anyone who might be interested in starting a business.

“If you have a dream, go for it,” said Fay. They also advocate networking. “Use your local college, Chamber office, Extension office...don’t be afraid to ask for help. Most people are willing to help when you ask.”

