

Cool red spread

New freezer jam made from local strawberries



KATRINA SIMMONS

Monica Chase has had a challenging year. The creator of Wild Goose came up with the idea of selling an all natural strawberry freezer jam with just three ingredients - strawberries, natural pectin and raw organic sugar.

Finding local strawberries to experiment with small-batch recipes was simple enough. Sourcing enough for more than 5,000 pots of jam, it turned out, was much harder.

"I live in Ontario, surrounded by strawberry fields," she says, "but when I started phoning around, the farmers weren't sure they could meet the demand."

When she talked to food distributors that might supply frozen berries, she learned that most of them were imported from places like Chile.

"Ontario is almost 100 per cent geared to the fresh market with strawberries. There is very little fruit left over for processing." She finally connected with Tigchelaar

Berry Farms, Vineland producers that supply many of the grocery stores with their luscious berries. They grow day-neutral varieties that produce fruit at various times throughout the summer, so they are able to supply her with strawberries long after the June rush for fresh berries has died down.

Chase was committed to making what she believes is the first freezer jam for the commercial market. Maintaining the high quality she would be proud to serve to her own family presented more hurdles - from keeping the berries cool and fresh throughout the process (she and her work crew hulled them while standing in Tigchelaar's cold storage unit) to finding an all-natural pectin extracted from apple peels, and a processor that could work with small batches. What she has created is certainly worthy of her efforts.

"It's not cooked, so there is 100 per cent difference in the flavour and the colour," she points out as she tops some goat cheese with the bright red spread, transforming my breakfast croissant to what seems a decadent treat.

Chase took a hiatus from her career as a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry when her two boys were born. With both of them in school now, she wanted to try her hand at something for which she has always had a passion.

Her husband Marvin helps with

the website, marketing and distribution, and her children are the most appreciative tasters. But why get into the food sector when so much of its future is unpredictable?

"I love the expressions on people's faces when they try my jam," she says with a smile. "When my family visits, it's gone within seconds. The strawberry farmer says it's the best he's ever had."

She has plans for new recipes next year, and has already found an Ontario supplier for raspberries. Wild blueberries will be the main ingredient in the jam she has planned for the Maritimes, and Oregon strawberries will fill the gap for Wild Goose's west coast version.

In the Hamilton area, you can find Wild Goose products at The Horn of Plenty in Dundas, Greensville Gourmet in Greensville, Marilu's Market in Burlington and Fenwood Farms in Ancaster.

For more information, visit wildgoosenaturals.com or e-mail monica@wildgoosenaturals.com.

TED BRELLISFORD, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Monica Chase, creator of Dundas's Wild Goose products, holds some Wild Goose strawberry freezer jam, which is completely different in flavour and colour from ordinary jam.

