

# DAILY CAMERA

## Beat the back-to-school crazies with products from Boulder County companies

Food to keep you going

By Cindy Sutter, Camera Staff Writer

### A good start - Birch Benders Micro-Pancakery Pancake & Waffle Mix

**What:** Pancake mixes made from natural and organic ingredients that require only water.

**Products include:** six flavors — Original, Gluten Free, Chocolate Chip, Six Grain Cinnamon, Banana Buckwheat, White Chocolate Macadamia

**Where to get:** Natural foods and grocery stores, on the cusp of national distribution

**The story:** Matt LaCasse arrived in Boulder on Halloween in 2010 and ended up on Pearl Street. Having just graduated from Yale, he had driven west with the idea of doing lots of skiing and working in the restaurant industry. He got a job almost immediately at the Kitchen Upstairs.

After he had been working there awhile, trying to decide what he wanted to do, an idea began to form. He began talking with his manager, Naomi Honig about the perfect food product: an egg you could crack onto a griddle that would produce a gourmet pancake.

She thought he might have something.

The idea, according to LaCasse, was: "What if pancake making was that easy? We started looking on the market and there wasn't anything that offered the convenience and the organic deliciousness we were looking for."

What they found was that most mixes, whether natural foods or mass market products, required the addition of eggs. They wanted a product that required only water. In its original incarnation, it came in a jar to which water was added. The jar was then shaken to produce batter ready to be poured onto the griddle. Almost as easy as cracking an egg.

But it was a long way from idea to jar.

"I worked every night at the restaurant, and every morning I'd wake up and work on the pancake recipes," he says.

The first jumping off point was a "Joy of Cooking" recipe, but he soon discovered that making a good-tasting water-only mix was really hard.

"There were a couple of times, I thought maybe there's a good reason it doesn't exist," he says.

Finding a dried egg product that didn't have off odors was a big problem. The eggs were also the biggest obstacle to making an entirely organic product. The price of organic eggs would have made the price unappealing to most consumers. However, the eggs they use are a clean food, and most of the other ingredients, including the chocolate chips in one variety, are organic. All ingredients are GMO free.

LaCasse was then joined by Lizzi Ackerman, a college friend, who is now chief operating officer of the company and LaCasse's fiancée. Ackerman was headed to med school after doing a post doc at Columbia University. She had once course left, organic chemistry, and decided to take it at the University of Colorado and study for her MCATs in preparation for admission. Soon, however, she found herself studying the taste and effects of various types of organic flours on pancake recipes.

After spending so much time in the lab for her studies, she realized double-blind testing was the way to go to determine the best flavor.

"I saw I could get involved in figuring out the best supplier for every ingredient, testing all the spring wheat, winter wheat and different protein levels," she says.

They double-blind tested more than 30 flours.

"We made a lot of pancakes," Ackerman says.

LaCasse, who majored in applied mathematics, adds "Our proportions are very precise."

They sold the product first at Lucky's Market and then got into Whole Foods. They then took the product to the natural foods show, Expo West, where it was well-received.

But there was a bump or two on the road. The jar concept was hard for consumers to grasp. It looked like the container hadn't been filled properly. Most recently, as they have worked toward national distribution, they have packaged the product in a 16-ounce size to bring it closer in price to the competition.

After all that pancake testing and tasting, how often do they actually eat the things?

"We had pancakes for dinner last night and breakfast this morning," LaCasse said last week. "We're always tinkering with them."



Birch Benders pancake mix requires only the addition of water to its natural and organic ingredients. (Cindy Sutter / Daily Camera)

Check out the full article here: [http://www.dailycamera.com/lifestyles/ci\\_26402449/beat-back-school-crazies-products-from-boulder-county](http://www.dailycamera.com/lifestyles/ci_26402449/beat-back-school-crazies-products-from-boulder-county)