

Hamilton Post

Demand for organic just keeps growing

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By Melanie Weiss

As the weather gets warmer, more people crave ice cream as a tasty way to cool off. But what about those who only eat organic foods, or who are lactose intolerant?

Thanks to Blackwell's Organic soy gelato and fruit sorbetto, organic eaters and lactose intolerants can finally enjoy a creamy, frozen treat without sacrificing taste, quality or the environment.

Blackwell's Organic, which hit stores this past January, is certified organic by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and the Northeast Organic Farming Association. All 12 gelati and sorbetti flavors are made with certified organic and Fair Trade ingredients, are completely vegan and free of dairy, cholesterol, extracts and preservatives, which illustrates their mission to be "green," "sustainable" and "a model out there for other businesses," said Marcia Blackwell, who owns and operates Blackwell's Organic with the help of her husband of eight years, Tom.

Blackwell said her passion for the environment has been a "lifetime thing." She makes her own organic dog food for Lucy, her "director of stress management." They eat organically at home and have an organic garden. They recycle, make compost and live in the first solar-powered home in Long Branch.

Patrons of Black Forest Acres, 1100 Route 33, got to experience this passion at a Blackwell's Organic tasting event on March 11.

Blackwell estimated 50 people took a taste, and about 10 came to the store because they read about it in a newspaper. Blackwell's Organic does not advertise, so they rely on tasting events to promote the product.

"It's important that people taste our product," said Blackwell. "We go to all the stores that sell our product and we do tasting events like we did today."

Black Forest Acres, which sells everything from organic food to environmentally-safe nail polish, has been selling Blackwell's Organic for about two months. Store owner Rudy Ringwald and his employees tried the product before stocking it in the freezers, and Ringwald said everyone at the store immediately fell in love.

"Anything organic is right up our alley," said Ringwald, who says the favorite flavor at the store is the mango sorbetto. "[Blackwell's Organic] is not like some of those places who have [their product] in a warehouse for months before shipping it to

stores. They make a very high-quality product.”

At first, Ringwald said customers seemed wary about buying such a high-end item, which runs about double the price of similar products.

“I think it’s actually a good value for the care we put into it and the quality of the product,” said Blackwell, who has been advised by friends at Rutgers Food Innovation and Research Center in Bridgeton and the Small Business Development Center at Brookdale Community College in Monmouth County.

Development of the product began years ago as lactose-intolerant Tom Blackwell tried to make an alternative to ice cream that was better than those already on the market. After raves from friends and neighbors and blind taste tests against comparable products, the Blackwells came up with a dairy-free, organic substitute to ice cream and sorbet that tastes exactly as the labels say.

“When you sample a spoonful of our chocolate soy gelato, it will be like you’re biting into a cool bar of chocolate,” says a letter from the Blackwells found on each Blackwell’s Organic container. “Try our strawberry sorbetto and you’ll enjoy the fresh picked taste of strawberries straight from the field.”

Though the Blackwell’s still make the product in small batches, the operation has moved from the Blackwell’s Long Branch home to Red Bank, where the “Italian tradition with a healthy twist” is made in machines imported from Italy.

Blackwell’s Organic gelato comes in chocolate, coffee, peanut butter, peanut butter-chocolate swirl and vanilla. Sorbetto flavors are made with 50 percent fruit and come in blueberry, lemon, mango, orange, pineapple, raspberry and strawberry. According to Blackwell, the most popular flavors at the Black Forest Acres tasting were chocolate, mango and strawberry.

Blackwell’s Organic is available at several health food stores and restaurants throughout New Jersey, but sold in Hamilton only at Black Forest Acres. It is also available for mail order online at blackwellsorganic.com.