

Small Business Spotlight:

Afke Zonderland | Owner Okanagan Rawsome, Est. 2008

Life Story

Born and raised on a large dairy farm in the Netherlands, Afke grew up with business decisions being made at the dinner table. For her being an entrepreneur wasn't an afterthought, it was genetic and after being self-employed for 30 years as an interior designer, Afke at 60 years of age decided to follow her second passion – healthy food. She bought a recipe book and started experimenting to create nutrient-rich, delicious raw snacks. But it wasn't until her daughter piped up and said how great the crisps were that she had even considered selling them.

Afke decided to fill a gap in the market and as luck would have it a wonderful food grant came through from the Small Business Association of BC which allowed her to purchase a commercial grade dehydrator that she had her eyes on for a long time – it would be her ticket to scale up and support the production demand for Okanagan Rawsome.

Okanagan Rawsome is a proud family business created by Afke Zonderland and her daughter Anna. They are a family "Farm to Fork" business in the small rural area of Grindrod.

What was the motivation behind starting your own business?

I saw the crisps were filling a personal need for so many with allergies, food challenges and also for children. People have become so educated about the quality of their food, a real shift in thinking for people to be preventative in our approach to health. You need to listen to people's needs then find innovative ways to fill them.

How has mentorship or networking played a role in where you are today?

Networking gets bigger for us all the time. We source from farms down the road that we drive by every day. We build relationships with the farmers and they grow specifically for us.

What do you see as your greatest accomplishment to date?

I've always been really pleased to offer some employment in a rural area. I've never felt that minimum wage was enough, so we pay fair, livable wages. I was also lucky to have Anna come home when she did. I was just a little sprout with an idea, but we became a team and there is a lot of accomplishment in that as well.



What unique challenges have you faced as an entrepreneur running a family owned business and how have you overcome them?

With the dynamics of a family business you have to make sure the personalities mesh, open communication is the bottom line. You need to set good boundaries, and plan ahead for different scenarios – and we always have chocolate in the fridge to get through the tough days.

What is it like operating a small business in a rural part of the Province?

It's a little bit inconvenient, but at the same time being where we are is what makes our company work. We can grow our produce and have access to the farms, I don't think this business would function nearly as well if we were in the city or a rented out space. We are a farm based business; we see everything grow from a little seed.

Tell us a little known fact about you.

We are both certified interior designers.

Where is your favourite B.C. destination?

The Okanagan is amazing; we love to ski and mountain bike.

Bottom Line

- In 2018 Anna has taken on a larger role with the business as Afke starts to enjoy her retirement years ahead
- 2018 Top 5 SBBC People's Choice Award nominee
- Afke would love to see her product on shelves right across Canada one day and continue on a forward path as a family owned business with sustainable growth, so long as they stay on the farm

[Read the full interview](#)