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BizProfile
By Mat Thomas

Rey of Sun

Sun Flour Baking Company
breaks the cookie mold

When Rey Ortega first started baking vegan cookies about ten years ago, it was for his own pleasure. But he soon got into the business because he wanted to make healthy, delicious cookies for everyone to enjoy—whether for vegans, those allergic to animal-derived ingredients, or any another cookie lover. That was not long after Ortega had become vegan. He also hadn't eaten cookies in nearly a decade because he literally couldn't stomach them. Plagued since childhood by diet-related ailments, he'd just about resigned himself to a life without sweets. The discovery that animal products were causing his ill health steered his life in an entirely new direction.

He asked a friend and co-worker at the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-Op to teach him how to bake vegan cookies, and the Sun Flour Baking Company was born... at least, that's where the story begins.

Ortega first single-handedly founded the Alternative Baking Company in 1994 using recipes he'd developed himself for commercial baking. A year later, he sought out business partners to help him expand the company, and within its first three years the enterprise grew from

Ortega's initial investment of less than \$5,000 to sales in excess of \$1 million a year. However, differences with his colleagues led Ortega to leave the company and launch the Sun Flour Baking Company in 1998. Making a fresh start, Ortega recalled how veganism had improved his own health and outlook. He therefore



❖❖❖ Turn to page 54 to see how Sun Flour rated in the VegNews Cookie Taste Test!

dubbed his new creation “The feel good cookie” and began building Sun Flour Baking from the ground up.

From the beginning, Sun Flour distinguished itself by making cookies with an extraordinarily soft, chewy texture that permeates every luscious bite. The quality of ingredients also makes its cookies uniquely nourishing. Sun Flour is the only company in the world to make cookies using pinto bean and rice flour, which is higher in protein and fiber than other flours, allowing those who are allergic to wheat to indulge their sweet tooth without ill effects. Sun Flour cookies are also made without hydrogenated oils, refined sugars, or GMOs, and sweetened only with organic evaporated cane and fruit juice. Furthermore, they are one of the few cookies on the market baked in a dedicated vegan facility with equipment that has never been tainted by dairy or eggs.

Ortega is rightfully proud of his cookies—all sixteen flavors—and does all he can to let as many people as possible taste them by giving away free samples at holistic and progressive events around the world. Each year, Sun Flour Baking generously donates tens of thousands of cookies to vegetarian societies, humane associations, animal rights groups, and other organizations who distribute them at fairs and conferences. This promotional strategy apparently contributes much to Sun Flour’s growing popularity.

The company’s sales have doubled each year since it started, and its products are now carried in Whole Foods and Wild Oats markets nationwide, along with independent health food stores, co-ops, juice bars, and

coffee shops around the country. American and Continental Airlines include Sun Flour cookies as part of their in-flight vegetarian meals. Cookies can also be ordered online at the company’s website. Ortega now thinks it’s time for Sun Flour to break into the mainstream, and hopes to soon sell his cookies to supermarkets, following in the path blazed by Newman’s Own.

Besides employing his skills as a master baker, Ortega’s business also serves as an outlet for his many other talents. He’s the company’s graphic designer and equipment mechanic, and has started a publishing house in the same building as the bakery. Sun King Publishing has already released several delightful children’s books extolling the virtues of health and empathy for animals. One, *Benji Bean Sprout Doesn’t Eat Meat*, is about the trials and triumphs of a school-age vegan. Ortega even co-authored *The Organic Adventures of Tucker the Tomato* with acclaimed artist Amanda Moeckel, and plans to publish a book of his original cookie recipes next year.

Ortega’s enthusiasm for health and compassion is evident in his creations. When it comes to his own life, he feels he’s been guided to his calling by a higher power. “I grew up in a macho, Hispanic culture where animals were not valued, and veganism was not even an option,” he says. “But when you show people how good vegan food can taste, and you explain that it’s healthier than what

they’re used to eating, then they may open up to the idea that animals were not put here simply for us to eat.” **VN**

MAT THOMAS is a writer for *In Defense of Animals* and lives in San Francisco with two adorable cats.



Best Selling Cookies	Sun King Publishing Books
<p>Traditional Vegan: Chocolate Chip German Chocolate • Lemony Lemon Peanut Butter • Lemon Custard Coconut</p> <p>Wheat/Gluten Free: Chocolate Chip Peanut Butter • Cinnamon Twist</p> <p>Bag Cookies: Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Raisin • Snickerdoodle</p> <p>For more flavors, nutritional information, & to order cookies, visit ❖❖❖ sunflourbaking.com</p>	<p>The Organic Adventures of Tucker the Tomato • Benji Bean Sprout Doesn’t Eat Meat • Natural Kids Fun Activity & Coloring Book</p> <p>To order books, as well as greeting cards and fine art prints, visit ❖❖❖ sunkingpublishing.com</p>

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