



SBDC Success Story

Yips Yogurt Chips

Getting natural yogurt chips into the hands of health-conscious consumers nationwide

Erin Vranas, who owns Parthenon Gyros with her husband Dimitri, is a longtime client of the Small Business Development Center at UW-Madison (SBDC). She attended SBDC's Entrepreneurial Training Program and completed a business improvement plan for Parthenon Gyros in 2017. Now, she's working with SBDC consultant Anne Inman on the business plan for her new venture, Yips Yogurt Chips.

Inman has helped Vranas prioritize and establish industry connections.

"Consulting with Anne has helped to provide a roadmap of where and when to focus attention," says Vranas. "Starting a business can get very overwhelming, so it's nice to have a sounding board."

Inman checks in regularly via email for updates and alerts

Vranas to industry-related news and opportunities.

"It's great to have an accountability partner," Vranas says. "I'm a learner at heart, so every experience helps me become more well-rounded in business and as a person. Anne helps me put the pieces together, step by step, with clarity."

In addition to SBDC, Vranas has leveraged UW-Madison resources like the Discovery to Product initiative, the Center for Dairy Research, and the Food Research Institute.

"Cecily Brose has been an awesome mentor and connected me with Tera Johnson from the Food Finance Institute," Vranas says. Brose is an Innovation and Commercialization Specialist at UW-Madison Discovery to Product with over 20 years of product and packaging experi-

ence in the consumer product industry. "We're not looking for financing yet, but I do have that as part of my strategy, once we need to do an investing round."

Vranas met with Food Research Institute staff to get her questions about food science and food safety answered and appreciates knowing she can continue to reach out to the institute with questions going forward. Vranas has also met with staff at the UW-Madison Center for Dairy Research, where Turbo Program Technology Commercialization Manager Vic Grass-



man helps entrepreneurs in the dairy industry get their products to market.

“They helped connect me with contract manufacturers and pointed me in the direction of regulations, including labeling laws, packaging, and nutrition facts,” says Vranas, who is considering applying for a grant from the Center in the future.

Vranas spent a year on business planning, while tweaking and testing her product. Yips went on the market on February 14, 2021 and is currently in 12 Foxtrot stores nationwide, three Metcalfe’s Markets in the Madison area, and several other Madison-area shops. Vranas initially planned to grow locally, then nationally, but when she applied to a Foxtrot competition as a lark and won, she realized she would be launching her product on a national scale.

“Scaling has been an interesting process, especially because we weren’t ready for it, but no one ever really is,” says Vranas. “As a startup company, you just have to be able to adapt, evolve, and pivot—run with changes and make improve-

ments based on what’s handed to you. Things came at us pretty quickly—all of a sudden, we were in stores nationwide.”

Vranas had to double, then quadruple, her production capacity within a few weeks.

“I’m lucky to have an amazing team, she says. “My husband does most of our operations, and a team of Parthenon people have become Yipsters. I appreciate that passion and commitment from people who are really interested and really believe in this.”

Yips production and packaging (designed by Vranas and created by Middleton-based ePac) currently takes place in Parthenon’s production facility on State Street in Madison.

Now, Vranas is putting her three-pronged sales plan into action:

- Get Yips on the shelves in stores that sell both in person and online, as well as natural health food stores and high-end convenience stores.
- Sell Yips online, via the Yips website and farmer’s market-style online

markets in Madison and Chicago, using influencer marketing and social media advertising.

- Test out less traditional venues, like corporate cafeterias, boutiques, and wineries, to see where Yips fits best.

Vranas plans to continue working with SBDC to “turn Yips into a national powerhouse.”

To learn more about this success story, visit sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/success-stories/

The UW-Madison Small Business Development Center supports businesses in Dane, Sauk, and Columbia Counties.



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~Erin Vranas