

Hope in a Jar

How a couple, struck by unemployment, turned a family **MARINARA RECIPE** into a thriving business.

IN NOVEMBER 2009, Michael and Robin Tesoro turned proverbial lemons into . . . tomato sauce. Faced with a stagnant economy and few job prospects at home in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, the husband-and-wife team had an epiphany in their kitchen: They could sell homemade marinara. “We borrowed Mason jars from neighbors and friends and stayed up until three o’clock in the morning cooking sauce and filling up jars,” says Robin, a former magazine editor and the mother of two young children. The sauce, named Ooma Tesoro’s after Michael’s grandmother and based on her recipe, consistently sold out at farmers’ markets. Today, it’s on the shelves of more than 200 stores in New England and many Whole Foods Markets in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, as well as six Dean & DeLuca retail stores. Michael and Robin credit their success to believing in the product, so much so that they finance it themselves. “You never really know whether it’s going to work or not,” says Michael, who previously worked as a media consultant. “You have to take a leap of faith.” Funding their business hasn’t been the only hurdle. To get their tomato sauce onto store shelves, they also had to learn the ins and outs of the food business, finding a local kitchen that met U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulations and spending weeks tweaking the recipe for large-scale production. As the demand increases, Michael and Robin are planning to expand their business—one handmade jarful at a time. —KRISTEN FLANAGAN



FULL-CIRCLE SERVICE
More than two years after starting a family tomato-sauce business, Michael Tesoro still fills every jar himself and works without a distributor.



the right stuff

The Tesoros tell us what has helped Ooma Tesoro's succeed and what they wish someone had told them when they launched the business.

TO STAY ORGANIZED . . .

we use the chalkboard in our kitchen a ton—for taking orders, keeping track of deliveries, making lists, and brainstorming.

OUR LIVES ARE SO MUCH EASIER BECAUSE OF . . .

Square (squareup.com), an amazing app that lets us accept credit cards on our iPhones when we're at farmers' markets.

WE WISH WE HAD KNOWN FROM THE START . . .

how to use Intuit Quickbooks Online (*Online Simple Start*, \$13 per month, quickbooksonline.intuit.com), which allows us to store our information online and access it from various devices.

EVERY DAY WE USE . . .

sharp Wüsthof knives (*Wüsthof Classic 5-Piece Mini Block Set*, \$150, surlatable.com). We slice a lot of onions and garlic!