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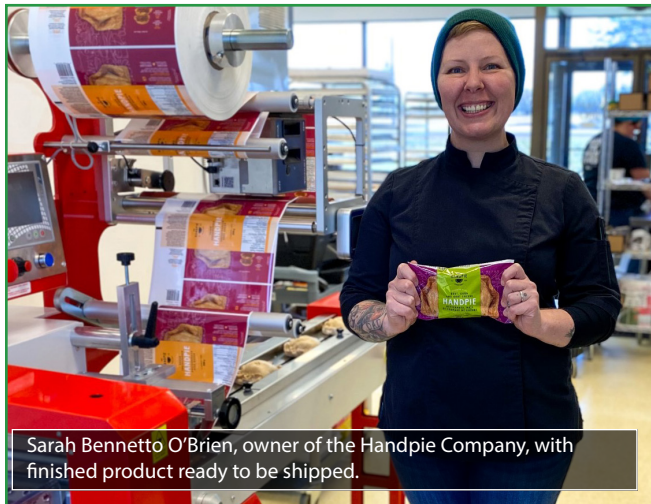
# Handpie Company

*Helping keep farms  
in the green*



**Canada**

## Like many Islanders, Sarah Bennetto O'Brien is a big fan of Outlander.



Sarah Bennetto O'Brien, owner of the Handpie Company, with finished product ready to be shipped.

The series of books by American author Diana Gabaldon, featuring a time travelling couple, has sold over 50 million copies and has also been turned into a television series. It has also proven to be Sarah's inspiration for what is quickly becoming a culinary favourite for Islanders and visitors alike-- handpies.

"They had a version of it in a cookbook based on the show," she explains. "It is similar in a way to the Cornish Pasty and I thought I would give it a try."

She did a test in her kitchen with all local ingredients, developing some potential flavours and then she put them on the menu at a restaurant she operated in Gateway Village. They quickly became a big seller, and Sarah enrolled in the Food Xcel program sponsored by Prince Edward Island Food Island Partnership in 2017, which offers food entrepreneurs help to develop a business plan and marketing advice for expanding an existing food product. By that time, the handpies were already accounting for over 30 per cent of the sales at her restaurant, so she decided to up that to 100 per cent, rebranding as The Handpie Company.

What exactly is a Handpie? Essentially it is a delicious meal enclosed in a pastry shell. Using all local ingredients, the creations range from pulled pork to bacon cheeseburger. There is even a breakfast option of maple pork sausage, as well as vegetarian options like beet, corn and goat cheese. There are even seven dessert handpies ranging from pumpkin pie to birthday cake.

The business quickly outgrew its Gateway Village location and moved into the former Scotiabank building in Albany the next year. Sarah also developed a network of retailers across the province, where frozen handpies can be purchased, that now stretches over all three counties. They sell the most popular brands of the frozen pies but fresh pies and all of the dessert varieties are now available at the retail location in Albany.

Sarah and her staff get asked all the time by people visiting from other parts of the Maritimes where they can buy their products closer to home. Right now, sales are restricted to within PEI but that will soon change.

To ship inter-provincially requires certification from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Sarah explains that requires another expansion-- this time to the new Food Works facility being developed by the Central Development Corporation with backing from the Food Island Partnership, Atlantic Canadian Opportunities Agency and Finance PEI in Borden-Carleton.

The Handpie company is the first tenant confirmed for the new facility and she notes the new 11,000 square foot unit is being built to company specifications. With funding help from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, the company is also purchasing a new packaging



machine that will allow for frozen product to be wrapped and ready for shipping.

"We have a smaller machine right now, but it would not be sufficient to keep up with the demand," she explained. "We have this potential off-Island customer base and we want to be able to service them by putting out products in stores throughout the Maritimes."

Sarah is a big believer in using fresh Island products, using local organic flour for the pastry, as well as a "ton of PEI potatoes sourced from farmers in the immediate area, as well as other food processing companies in the area like Atlantic Beef, Larkin farms and ADL.

"I love to support the neighbours," she said. "That is really how the community grows."

The Albany location has a full-time staff of eight and the workforce increases to 13 during the peak summer months. When the new facility is fully ramped up, the workforce will expand to about 30. Sarah explained Food Works location will be a manufacturing facility only and the Albany building will remain open as a retail store with some limited production.

While challenges like COVID, supply chain issues and Post-tropical Storm Fiona have slowed down construction of the new plant, she is hoping to be able to make the move before the end of 2023. She added "having a workspace that is designed to work with our flow and our processes is going to be so great."

While she is obviously happy with the way the company has grown, she admits "I never thought the idea would take off like it has-- never in a million years. However, now I feel we are not done expanding yet but we want to make sure we continue to grow sustainably."

Whatever the future holds, one thing is for certain -- she plans to keep all of the manufacturing here on PEI. She added "this is a great place to live and work and if you are willing to work hard, the support is there for you."