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Langford business hunts for local pepper growers

Christine van Reeuwyk



Island Chef Pepper Company's Vicky and Vince Capitano celebrate opening a shop at Bear Mountain. (Island Chef Pepper Co.)

Five years of red-hot growth finds a Langford business on the hunt for farmers to fulfill its produce needs.

Island Chef Pepper Company kicked off its hot sauce campaign almost exactly five years ago, with a recent leap into full-time status for Vicky and chef Vince Capitano.

"Which was exciting, but scary," said operations manager Vicky.

What started at the farmers market is now in 150-plus locations and 100 Vancouver Island restaurants.

Now offering everything from hot sauce to rubs and jellies, they're catering from a commercial kitchen and retail site on Mica Place in Langford and in groceries as far east as Lethbridge, Alta. and in conversations with grocers in other provinces.

Already working with a handful of local farms to provide the key produce, they just need more volume, says operations manager Vicky.

The two key ingredients are Fresno – to the tune of at least 25,000 pounds – and red bell peppers. Both are base ingredients in their most popular condiments – West Coast Classic, sriracha and Buffalo – classic hot wing sauces. There's also a need for scotch bonnet, green jalapeno, orange habanero, green serrano, and in the non-pepper category, tomatillos.

While growing the traditionally hot-climate crops is a little more challenging locally, it's "definitely a preference."

"We get a lot of support from local businesses, and like to support local farms and farmers," Vicky said.

Currently the business goes through 30,000 pounds of peppers a year, and the demand is increasing. The goal is to avoid the need to turn to U.S. product. Anyone interested in growing can find contact info at islandchefpepperco.ca.

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