

How Hayden Flour Mills got its start, found success

Georgann Yara

Special to Arizona Republic USA TODAY NETWORK

Her family's heritage grains and flours have a loyal following and are the go-to ingredients of high-profile chefs and James Beard Award honorees.

The trademark white box with classic font print across the front is on shelves in more than 500 retail shops, including those on the national stage such as Whole Foods Markets and Eataly.

But Hayden Flour Mills co-owner Emma Zimmerman doesn't remember when she realized the daughter-and-pop operation she runs with her father Jeff Zimmerman was much bigger than the one that kept them up late Friday nights 11 years ago, hand-bagging and labeling coffee bags stuffed with their wares to sell early at farmers markets the next day.

The a-ha moment escapes her. "Maybe we haven't had that yet," Emma said with a soft laugh. "We still feel like it's a passion project."

Hayden Flour Mills is known for fresh flours stone ground from some of the oldest varieties of heritage and ancient grains that create its polenta, pasta flour, pizza dough flour and even mixes for pancakes and tortillas. Crackers, pasta and grain bowl starters such as white sonora wheat berries and emmer farro berries also are part of the lineup.

The name honors the original flour mill in downtown Tempe, across the street from Tempe Town Lake. It started production in 1874, in the structure marked by iconic silos that, although not operational, stand today as an historic testament to the industry.

When the Zimmermans launched their Queen Creek-based company in 2011, they relied on home-printer labels and endless hours prepping orders at the loading dock. While marketing images have evolved to reflect a corporate image, Emma still sees the business baby she and her dad closely nurtured.

"We're still so hands-on. We go out and talk to the farmers, dad packs up orders," she said. "We have this beautiful website and great packaging, but it still feels very homey."

Emma's new cookbook, 'The Miller's Daughter,' is the latest way she's allowing the public a glimpse into her own home and kitchen.

Through photographs, 80 recipes and the stories surrounding them, Emma presents grains' abilities to give everyday meals a boost. Even tried-and-true formulas get refreshed in dishes such as pink polenta with crispy pancetta, sprouted barley salad, farro crust tart and white sonora berry salad.

A chickpea chocolate chip cookie that gets a rich nutty boost from tahini is the most popular recipe. The chocolate flecked farro banana bread is among Emma's favorites and one she recommends because it showcases the delicious difference that an unconventional grain can make in a common formula.

The book is the culmination of five years worth of recipe and idea collection. It also answers many of the questions she and her dad were asked over the last decade.

"I wanted to answer the question of what to do with all of these grains and flours we make. I didn't want to write a bread book, but I cook a lot with grains and flours," Emma said. "I wanted to tell our story. And people love it. They love the story."

A lack of additives, processing

Often, the Zimmerman's get feedback from customers with gluten sensitivities but have no issues with Hayden Flour Mills flour or products. Emma believes the clean processing and lack of additives plays a role.

Benny Blanco Tortillas owner Christopher Hudson has also heard this from his customers.

Hudson uses the White Sonora and Rouge de Bordeaux wheat flours to make his small-batch tortillas. Customers who do not have Celiac Disease but do experience digestive stress when consuming other wheat products tell him they don't have problems eating his tortillas. Hudson believes much has to do with the lack of pesticides and additives that others contain.

"There's so much processing that extra nutrients are added in because there's none left. Hayden doesn't have to do that," Hudson said.

Hudson's Gilbert-based business has grown and so have his Hayden orders, from 200 pounds a month to 2,500 pounds a

month to keep up with demand. Hudson said he can get these flours from other companies. But, he likes that this flour is stone milled as opposed to steel milled, which retains more nutrients and has extra hardiness and a texture he prefers.

He also likes that they are local. “Supporting my local economy and local small businesses is the biggest reason for me,” said Hudson, who, unlike most bakers, gets 100% of his flour from the Zimmermans. “Some don’t like to put all their eggs in one basket. But we’re all in. We like the Hayden basket.”

Jeff Zimmerman grew up on a North Dakota farm. He’s not a farmer, but he is a bread baker.

Growing up, Emma and her siblings watched him bake and both parents experiment in the kitchen.

“They had lots of hobbies throughout my childhood. Coffee roasting, fermenting ... there was always something they were trying to master,” Emma recalled.

The bread phase came and went. Then it returned in the form of flour.

Emma’s mother is a dietitian. That led to discussions between her parents about what people are consuming and how that may connect to declining health in recent decades. Naturally, it led to examining labels — namely those on mainstream store bought bread — and noticing all the extra ingredients that didn’t need to be there.

Jeff’s farm background kicked in. He began looking at heritage grains that have been around for centuries. He saw it as a path to a healthier way of life.

Dreams of family business come true

In 2009, Jeff called Emma, who was attending McGill University in Montreal pursuing a doctorate, and approached her with his idea that was the seed for Hayden Flour Mills.

Blessed with a gift for ingenuity, storytelling and persuasiveness, Jeff presented his case. Emma was convinced.

Growing up, Emma was the one of four Zimmerman children who was reliably found with her dad, tinkering around the house, fixing a car and other projects.

“As a kid, I always wanted to have a business with my dad.

It was always a fun dream of having a family business,” Emma said.

Two years after that phone call, that fantasy became reality.

Then, James Beard Award winner and Pizzeria Bianco and Pane Bianco chef/owner Chris Bianco made a call of his own.

His brother, Marco Bianco, who made the bread at sandwich shop Pane, found out about the Zimmermans’ undertaking. Moved by their aim, connection to local farmers and nostalgia over the original mill, Chris began using the flour for his pizza dough. Marco also used it to make his famous bread. It didn’t take long for the word to spread and other chefs to follow suit.

The timing dovetailed with a strong local first movement.

“I feel we are so supported by local customers and local chefs. We couldn’t have made our business without them,” Emma said.

The Zimmermans are part of an ancient grains market valued at \$457.3 million and is expected to reach \$6.3 billion by 2027, according to Market Data Forecast.

But the bottom line isn’t everything for the daughter-dad business partners. Maintaining an altruistic endeavor and creating an independent legacy that they won’t sell to a giant corporation is at the heart of Hayden Flour Mills, Emma explained. Even if it affects the bottom line.

“Because it is a passion project, we are staying true to that and not straying from the mission of bringing these heritage grains back,” said Emma, who admitted this is the motivation for keeping items that don’t sell well. “We are doing something that we believe is good for everyone’s health It’s not always the best business decision, but this is why we do what we do.”

HAYDEN
from page **BG01** to **BG04**

What: Hayden Flour Mills **Where:** 22100 S. Sossaman Road, Queen Creek **Employees:** Eight **Factoid:**

The ancient grain market is valued at \$457.3 million according to Market Data Forecast.

Details:

480-557-0031, haydenflourmills.com



Emma and Jeff Zimmerman are the owners of Hayden Flour Mills. COURTESY DAVID ALVERADO



Hayden Flour Mills co-owner Emma Zimmerman's cookbook 'The Miller's Daughter' is the culmination of five years' worth of recipe and idea collection. COURTESY CHRISTINE MOYER

[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)

Thursday, 08/11/2022 Page .BG01

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK Copyright © 2022 The Arizona Republic 8/11/2022