



Wild Zora co-founder Zora Tabin loads up product to ship to Walmart. Courtesy Wild Zora.

How Wild Zora prepared for its massive Walmart deal

By **Jensen Werley** — January 22, 2019

LOVELAND — One thousand stores is just a drop in the bucket for an international goliath such as Walmart, but for family-owned Wild Zora Foods LLC, serving product to that number of stores is a 600 percent increase in its production capacity.

But founders Zora and Joshua Tabin didn't want to wonder if they would regret passing on such a deal — selling their meat and veggie bars in 1,000 WalMart stores — so they spent three months ramping up.

That meant expanding their production facilities, bringing on new employees and even getting a second mortgage on their house to finance the endeavor.

“It wasn’t easy,” Joshua Tabin told BizWest. “It was like a python trying to swallow a pig.”

Fortunately, Wild Zora had some assistance. The city of Loveland was extremely cooperative, Tabin said, taking urgent changes to the company’s existing permit and moving it through “like lightning” to get what Wild Zora needed without delaying its rollout. He said Walmart also cooperated, agreeing to a limited amount of stores and limited skews from Wild Zora rather than putting its products in every store, something Wild Zora didn’t believe it could keep up with.

“We increased our production by about 600 percent,” he said. “We worked for three months to build up product for the rollout, because our capacity was just lower than where we needed it to be. When we shipped, two full semi trucks went out that were absolutely packed.”

Wild Zora also doubled its production staff and more-than-doubled its marketing staff.

“Getting on the shelf in Walmart is the first step, but selling your products and getting them off the shelf is more important,” Tabin said.

The company plans to increase brand awareness, especially because the typical Walmart shopper might not know about its products yet. However, there’s a major benefit to consumers to start purchasing Wild Zora from Walmart: The snacks will be cheaper there than anywhere else, even Wild Zora’s own website.

“There’s a concern that healthy-minded consumers might not want a product that is sold at Walmart,” he said. “But once they realize that we’re a real-deal, small, local natural products business on the shelf, it will open us up to more people who might not usually afford healthy food. Not everyone in the country shops at Whole Foods or can pay the time and cost to buy online. We think having our products at a lower price point will make us more available.”

While partnering with Walmart was a significant investment, Tabin said that because Walmart purchases its products directly from a manufacturer, rather than a third-party distributor, Wild Zora is able to have better margins, and the savings from not using a middle man can be passed onto consumers.

Despite that knowledge, he said, making the initial investments to ramp up production was



*Wild Zora filled two semi-trucks with their meat and veggie bars, which were sent to 1,000 Walmart stores.
Courtesy Wild Zora.*

scary and required mortgaging their personal home.

“It was very tight, we don’t have outside investors, we’re a small family business,” he said. “But we’ve shipped a few days ago and are sleeping much better now than we did a week ago.”

But not taking a risk — albeit ones that were as limited as possible, such as capping the number of stores for its initial release — wasn’t an option, Zora said.

“We didn’t want to sit here two years from now and wonder if we should have taken the risk,” she said. “As entrepreneurs, we take risks. We take smart ones: I like my home and want to keep it long-term. But we didn’t want to wonder, it’s better to know now.”