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Snacking for success: DeRego's moves in new direction

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DeRego's in Starkville is rebranding itself. The successful bread and pastry shop looks to move towards the regional landscape and beyond by marketing its popular selection of whole grain crackers.

The shop will still offer a variety of breads and pastries every Friday, but the shop will move away from offering sandwiches and pizzas during lunches. The shift comes after owner Troy DeRego noticed he wasn't reaching the bakery's full potential while balancing a lunch menu, subscription service, weekly bread and pastry orders and participating in the Starkville Community Market twice weekly.

"We live differently these days," DeRego said. "We snack, we don't do things on such a rigid schedule when it comes to food. People grocery shop differently now too. How do you take all the things that are great about bread and turn that into a format that works? With the crackers, we get more flexibility. I am trying to think of how can I make a product to solve some problems people have with bread."

The bakery has always excelled at making sourdough products, and the two most popular crackers: Starkville Sourdough and sunflower seed were made from leftovers from a previous night's baking.

"I would leave it in the cooling oven overnight," DeRego said. "The next day I would come in and it would kind of look

delicious. I realized the only thing missing from it was a little bit of salt and there is this delicious food source."

There's an advantage to working with sourdough, he added.

"As a sourdough bakery, we've always had that natural flavoring and natural preservative enhancer built into what we do," DeRego said. "It's been a byproduct of our routine here."

The rebranding effort will update the bakery's website to allow for online layaway orders of whatever is being made on a given Friday to let people have a chance to buy breads and pastries in the fixed availability window. A new logo has been drafted,

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and DeRego's will soon start shipping crackers around the country. Setting up direct sales online will help drive production, he said.

"Crackers are the original road food," DeRego said. "That's where it came from. I think it's the same thing for us now. I like the idea of taking it off on your adventures. I have friends and family all over the country that ask if we could ship stuff. Shipping bread is expensive. Crackers solve that problem."

By focusing on portable whole grain snacks, the bakery will target gift shops, specialty stores and restaurants to market products. Currently the shop is testing how many crackers staff can make in a week ahead of the website shuffle. Crackers range from \$4 to \$5.

With the rebrand in tow, DeRego plans to attend the largest food show in the county next summer. Hosted annually in New York City by the Specialty Food Association, the Summer Fancy Food Show brings together restaurants, vendors and suppliers from across the country.

"That's where you have to be," DeRego said. "Every brand is there. That's where you get introduced to the national buyers and take the next step. I think we've got a shot of getting there and moving forward. It's going to take a great focus and that's why we've had to cut out some stuff."

Moving away from offering lunch items will free up more time to focus on expanding the business, while offering special, limited availability items throughout the year. Two limited selections of crackers currently at the bakery are from spent beer grains from local brewers in Oktibbeha County.

The weekly bread and pastry box subscription services won't be interrupted by the change, DeRego said. The rebranding effort isn't the first change to hit the bakery, and might not be the last.

"We stayed small and lean so we could stay malleable," DeRego said. "Whether that was by choice or by not having the money to, I don't know. But right now I feel really lucky we've done it this way. It's DeRego's, it could change tomorrow."

To learn more about the shop and the seasonal subscription service, visit deregosbread.com.