

## Garlic Gold Finds Recipe for Success

By Lisa McKinnon

Posted September 7, 2010 at 6:17 p.m.

Rinaldo Brutoco's family recipe for toasted bits of garlic suspended in extra-virgin olive oil has hit the big time: Now made under the Garlic Gold label in a certified-organic commercial kitchen in Ventura, it is bottled, boxed and shipped to more than 4,000 retail sites across the country.

But there may be still more gold to be found in those crunchy nuggets, thanks to a new partnership with the online shopping site OpenSky.

Described as a "relationship commerce platform," OpenSky connects selected bloggers who tout the qualities of products like Garlic Gold with a way for online audiences to purchase those same products. And it happens without the hassle of clicking away to another website to place an order.

Interested readers-turned-shoppers instead click on the blue "add to cart" button in a post by their favorite OpenSky "shopkeeper" or blogger, then enter a mailing address and payment information. Those details go to the manufacturer, who ships the item and then shares a percentage of the sale with OpenSky and the website or blogger who triggered it.

This is what's known as "monetizing" a blog, or making a little money for extolling the virtues of stuff many bloggers already were writing about, according to OpenSky founder and CEO John Caplan. Further, it enables them to do so without worrying about inventory, customer service, shipping or transaction technology, Caplan said.

It also is a way for small companies to bring niche products like Garlic Gold to the attention of engaged customers without the expense of traditional, hit-or-miss forms of advertising, said Brian Chossek, president of Ventura-based Seven Oaks Farm Inc., the parent company of Garlic Gold.

"We're not Procter & Gamble. We don't have the money to run national TV ads for a mainstream audience of millions of people who may or may not be interested in our product at that precise moment," Chossek said.

"In contrast, bloggers are writing about what they believe in as a way to share with others. The interest level — in food, in healthy diets, in small companies — is built in," he said.

And if some bloggers hadn't yet heard of Garlic Gold, a goodie box from sales director Kathy Couturie is likely to rectify the situation.

Filled with items from Garlic Gold's ever-expanding line of products (it now includes a Meyer lemon vinaigrette made with citrus grown at the Seven Oaks Farm property in Ojai), dozens of the boxes have been mailed out in recent months to websites, journalists and bloggers — including many who aren't part of the OpenSky project.

"Our goal is to reach out to the serious food community, to find a way to get Garlic Gold to jump off the shelves and into people's mouths," Couturie said with a laugh. "Because once people taste it, they love it."

### Recipe for success

A global business consultant and current Men's Warehouse board member, Seven Oaks Farm founder and CEO Rinaldo Brutoco also is the founder and president of the World Business Academy in Ojai and the author of "Freedom From Mid-East Oil."



He also is an accomplished cook who delights in having friends and co-workers over for meals at the home he shares with wife Lalla, said Couturie, a fellow foodie who has been a contributing writer for Edible Ojai.

Such gatherings used to be the only way to sample what became known in the Brutocos' social circle as "that garlic thing." That changed in 2002, when the family was living at the Seven Oaks property in Ojai and son Orion Brutoco and his eighth-grade classmates at Oak Grove School were assigned an economics project.

## Garlic Gold

Visit the website: [www.garlicgold.com](http://www.garlicgold.com)

For more information on OpenSky visit:

<http://shopopensky.com/>

Read online: <http://www.vcstar.com/news/2010/sep/07/garlic-gold-finds-recipe-for-success/#ixzz0ywqbW8hJ>

The kids decided to create a business plan for what they called Garlic Gold. Then they began using organic garlic grown on the 12.5-acre ranch to make the salt-free condiment for sale at the Ojai farmers market.

When the organic produce distributor Albert's Organics picked up Garlic Gold about a year later, Chossek said, demand outpaced the supply of garlic grown at the Ojai property, which until recently was known as Seven Oaks Ranch. The company looked to other growers, including Christopher Ranch in Gilroy, to fill the gap.

Then potential disaster struck. A shortage of organic, American-grown garlic about four years ago forced the company to decide between importing garlic or going out of business, Chossek said.

"We chose to stay in business by bringing in certified-organic garlic from Mexico, Argentina and, although this isn't exciting to hear, China," he said.

At the chain's request, only American-grown organic garlic is used for Garlic Gold products sold at Whole Foods Market locations, Chossek said.

Likewise, Garlic Gold items sold at the Seven Oaks booth at the Ojai farmers market also are made with American garlic, said Greg Prinz, who operates the booth.

Regardless of where it comes from, the garlic arrives in the same form for processing, said production manager Lee Prather — raw, in bulk and already peeled.

The slicing of the cloves into tiny pieces is done by hand by many of the same employees who have been with the company since before its operations moved from a restaurant kitchen in downtown Ojai to the industrial-park space in Ventura, Prather said.

Some of the steps in the cooking process are considered proprietary information, but all are in place to ensure that the garlic pieces "strike that delicate balance between undercooked and overcooked," said Chossek. "We want them nice and crunchy."

That crunch remains even when organic, extra-virgin olive oil from Greece is added to the pieces, resulting in a jar of Garlic Gold (\$6 for a 3.75-ounce container at the farmers market; about \$6.30 at area stores).

But the nuggets also are now available by themselves, in the "original" flavor or with Parmesan, Italian seasonings or sea salt added. New nugget flavors will be introduced within the next six months, Couturie said.

And lest OpenSky have all the online glory, a retooling of the Garlic Gold website also is in the works, Couturie said. Until then, it features a video of Brutoco whipping up an omelet of onions, goat cheese, sun-dried tomatoes and, yes, Garlic Gold.

"You can use it on anything," he tells viewers.

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