



# Handcrafting Flavor in Southern Oregon



Photo by David Gibb | dgibbphoto.com

Amy's Kitchen is one of the largest employers in Southern Oregon, and since it opened a massive facility 10 years ago, it continues to exert a major impact on the local economy.

In 2006, the Santa Rosa-based company built a production plant north of Medford that features 450,000-square-feet of space, produces two of Amy's largest product categories, soups and pizzas.

Bringing Amy's to the region required foresight on the part of owners Andy and Rachel Berliner as well as a lot of heavy lifting and years of courting by officials, particularly Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc., Business Oregon and jurisdictional partners.

Amy's began with a simple idea 30 years ago that was born out of necessity, and the move to this region helped propel the company to greater heights. In 1987, the Berliners named the company after their daughter, Amy. Starting out small, the couple made just one style of vegetable pot pie, which instantly became a hit with consumers.

That idea grew, and today Amy's makes more than 250 products and has 2,450 employees, 950 of whom work in Southern Oregon. You can find Amy's products in 29 countries.

Andy and Rachel Berliner, Owners  
Amy's Kitchen  
[www.Amys.com](http://www.Amys.com)  
441 W Antelope Road  
White City, Oregon 97503  
(541) 831-3000

*"In 2012, with demand for Amy's continually growing, we opened our kitchen in Medford and built our ideal kitchen from the ground up. There are rooms dedicated solely to pizza dough and making tofu, and there's even an entire room for mixing spices."*

*— George Pelch,  
Amy's Plant Manager*

THE SOUTHERN OREGON  
**EDGE**

[www.SOREDI.org/edge](http://www.SOREDI.org/edge)  
by SOREDI | Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc.

(541) 773-8946

# Handcrafting Flavor in Southern Oregon

Amy's Kitchen, a pioneer in the healthy food business, made an investment in Southern Oregon 10 years ago that has been heralded as a defining moment in the region's economy.

In 2006, the Santa Rosa-based company did a lot of soul searching before selecting a tract of land north of Medford for the first expansion effort outside of California. But the popular organic food company didn't stop there. "In 2012, with demand for Amy's continually growing, we opened our kitchen in Medford and built our ideal kitchen from the ground up," said George Pelch, Amy's local plant manager. "There are rooms dedicated solely to pizza dough and making tofu, and there's even an entire room for mixing spices."

Once the expansion was complete, Amy's workforce grew to 950 in Medford, making it one of the largest employers in Southern Oregon. The local plant, boasting 450,000-square-feet of space, produces two of Amy's largest product categories, soups and pizzas.

Bringing Amy's to the region required foresight on the part of owners Andy and Rachel Berliner as well as a lot of heavy lifting and years of courting by officials, particularly Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc., Business Oregon and jurisdictional partners.

In 2004, then-Gov. Ted Kulongoski sent a letter and personally called Andy and Rachel Berliner, urging them to come to Oregon. At the same time, California's former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also made a pitch to the Berliners to stay in his state. But the couple made its commitment to building in Southern Oregon, a region known for its agricultural bounty, a thriving wine industry and a strong local food business. Later, voters in Jackson County decided to create a GMO-free zone that further amplified the area's appeal with the organic food crowd.

Amy's began with a simple idea 30 years ago that was born out of necessity, and the move to this region helped propel the company to greater heights, after building up the business from humble beginnings. In 1987, the Berliners were expecting their daughter, Amy, the company's namesake. Andy went to a store in search of food that was convenient, but also healthy and tasty, with a home-made flavor.

After he realized that there was nothing on the shelves that suited his needs, Andy had an idea. Why not create healthy meals that are convenient and taste great? Starting out small, the couple made just one style of vegetable pot pie, which instantly became a hit with consumers. That idea grew, and today Amy's makes more than 250 products and has 2,450 employees. You can find Amy's products in 29 countries. "Looking back, we helped pioneer the organic food industry," Pelch said.

Despite the growth, the Berliners' business is privately owned, giving them the freedom to make choices that have a strong connection with the values that helped them start Amy's in the first place. "We take homestyle methods and work to scale them up," Pelch explained. "We make ingredients, like tofu and burrito wraps, from scratch, and we do a lot by hand, like hand-stretching pizza crusts and hand-rolling burritos."

The employees that produce these meals at manufacturing plants in Pocatello, Idaho, Santa Rosa or here in Medford are dedicated to the high standards maintained by Amy's. In fact, when people take tours of the local facility, they are surprised to see people hand-rolling the popular burritos.

Because one of Amy's core values is the care of their employees, both the Santa Rosa and Medford locations have on-site health centers with bilingual staff.

Amy's has a Local Donation Committee at its plant that is geared to helping local nonprofits as well as outreach to the community. Pelch said Amy's has a scholarship program that supports education costs for employees' children. "We're still looking to hire people at this location," Pelch said. "We're always looking for great people, so stay tuned for our next job fair."

Pelch moved to the valley six years ago with his wife, Kim, and son and daughter. His son graduated from the University of Oregon, and his daughter is a junior there.

Pelch, who is involved in many local organizations, said one of the appeals of the Medford location is the natural beauty of the area, as well as the great restaurants, the Britt Festival and rafting on the Rogue River. "It's ideal for outdoor activities that our employees and their families enjoy, and there's a strong sense of community here," he said. "We also appreciated that it is in a valley with an agricultural heritage and a deep appreciation for quality food."



Photo by David Gibb | dgbphoto.com

Just a few of Amy's many organic soup varieties.

THE SOUTHERN OREGON  
EDGE

[www.SORED1.org/edge](http://www.SORED1.org/edge)

by SOREDI | Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc.