



# Organic Goodness Rooted in the Rogue Valley



Photo by David Gibb | dgibbphoto.com

Organic food was relatively unknown in 1982 when Elizabeth and Richard Fugas set a course to create the freshest, most flavorful foods when they formed the now famous enterprise known as Rising Sun Farms.

The Fugas started one of the first certified organic farms in Oregon, and the foods they create are inspired by their early work on yachts that docked in many exotic lands. Their quest has turned into a multi-million-a-year operation with 35 employees, growing to 70 during the peak season.

Rising Sun Farms' organic roots have helped it cultivate the tastiest of products, using the finest, freshest ingredients with a minimum impact on the planet. The company continues to expand its repertoire of delicious, all-natural specialty foods such as cream cheese tortas, pestos, and DipnSpreads®.

In 2017, Rising Sun received a national award for its pesto dried tomato cheese torta. In recent years, Rising Sun's tortas have reaped numerous awards in various contests throughout the country. Rising Sun now has over 100 awards for their products as well as one of the largest and fastest growing woman-owned companies in the Northwest.

Over the years, the company has improved its operations and installed new equipment to gain greater efficiencies, producing 75,000 pounds of pesto a month. Rising Sun has achieved the highest level of food safety; Safe Quality Foods level 3.

Rising Sun relies on trained workers, many of whom have been with the company for more than 20 years.

Elizabeth and Richard Fugas, Owners  
Rising Sun Farms  
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*"It was just that we loved doing what we do, and as I always told my children, you've got to love what you're doing and do what you love because it makes a difference in how you look at the world."*

– Elizabeth Fugas,  
Rising Sun's Owner



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# Organic Goodness Rooted in the Rogue Valley

At the dawn of the organic food phenomena, one of the pioneers of what would become a multi-billion industry is Southern Oregon's very own Rising Sun Farms. It was 1982, and owner Elizabeth Fugas had worked on an ocean racing yacht, cooking up an abundance of fresh food in faraway lands. On their return home to raise a family, Fugas and her husband, Richard, found to their dismay a plentiful supply of iceberg lettuce and processed cheese, prompting them to wonder, "Where's the fresh food?"

Organic food was relatively unknown at the time, and the Fugas knew little about farming. But that didn't stop them in their quest to cultivate fresh produce to create the kind of foods that had inspired them in their travels. "We became one of the first certified organic farms in Oregon, primarily because we wanted to eat great food," Elizabeth said. That vision has turned into a multi-million-dollar-a-year operation with 35 employees, throttling up to 70 during the peak season. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the organic food industry generates sales of \$35 billion in 2014.

Rising Sun Farms' organic roots have helped it cultivate some of the tastiest products, using the finest, freshest ingredients with a minimum impact on the planet. The thriving business continues to expand its repertoire of delicious, all-natural specialty foods such as cream cheese tortas, pestos, and DipnSpreads®.

The decision to become farmers, and finally to create a company in Phoenix, Oregon, was literally borne out of the Fugas' travels. In 1976, Elizabeth signed on as a chef on an ocean racing yacht, providing her with the opportunity to try exotic ingredients and to make a name for herself with creative dishes, particularly her famous pesto. After a few years, she met her husband, a ship captain in the West Indies.

Eventually, they decided to settle down with their growing family and start an herb farm in the Colestin Valley. As their food became more popular, their remote operation became more impractical. "We needed more water, more employees, more access to infrastructure, so we moved the farm processing and growing here to Phoenix," Fugas said.

After demonstrating their rendition of the popular and savory Italian torta in Dallas, Texas, the Fugas' began shipping this product around the country. "I figured out how to freeze cheese, and to this day it's still one of our signature secrets that nobody else has figured out how to do," she said.

Just recently, Rising Sun received a national award for its pesto dried tomato cheese torta. In recent years, Rising Sun's tortas have reaped numerous awards in various contests throughout the country. At this time, Rising Sun has garnered over 100 awards for products as well as for one of the largest as fastest growing woman owned business in the Northwest.

A big part of the business, which has grown exponentially in recent years, is bottling products for other companies. "But we can't advertise because these customers think that it should be a secret," Fugas said. Over the years, Rising Sun has improved its operations and installed new equipment to gain greater efficiencies, allowing more time for product development.

While the farm is an organic operation, Rising Sun relies on other sources to provide many of the raw materials for its expanding product line. Rising Sun has received the highest rating from the SQF (Safe Quality Food) Institute. "What it does is guarantee to our customers that we go the extra mile to make sure all our ingredients have been tested and are authorized to use," Fugas said.

To give some idea of the scale of Rising Sun's operation, it produces 75,000 pounds of pesto a month. "When we first started pesto, we couldn't give it away," Fugas said. "People would say, 'Ew, it's green, and I like the red sauce.' And I'd say, 'Try the green sauce. It's really, really good and easy.'"

Rising Sun relies on trained workers, many of whom have been with the company for more than 20 years. Recently, by word of mouth, the Fugas hired an engineer from Northern California through their connections in the industry. Though finding the right employees can be a challenge, the Fugas are on the lookout for someone with the right kind of personality, who will be dedicated and work well with others. "If you have somebody who is willing to come to work and learn, they can climb the scale very quickly, and we encourage that," she said. "We have a great team."

For a couple who have sailed the world, they have found their bliss in the Rogue Valley. "It's a wonderful area," said Elizabeth, who grew up in the much more congested East Coast. "Everybody's so happy. Obviously, the climate, the access to the outdoors. In a half hour or so, we can be skiing. Then we have the lakes."

The Fugas continue to create new products inspired by their travels and wake up every day with a zeal to make the best food they possibly can. "It was just that we loved doing what we do, and as I always told my children, you've got to love what you're doing and do what you love because it makes a difference in how you look at the world," Elizabeth explained.



Rising Sun Farms' range of savory Italian tortas.

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