

A Making It In Michigan **SUCCESS** STORY

A DECADE OF CREATING OPPORTUNITY AND ACCELERATING INNOVATION



BRAZILIAN OVEN

Silvana Quadros Russell was born in Sao Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo and raised in Guaxupe, Minas Gerais – the Brazilian state in which “Pão de Queijo” or cheese bread rolls, originated. She grew up eating the snack/appetizer, not due to celiac disease or gluten intolerance, but because it has been part of the Brazilian diet for the last 200 years. When she moved to the U.S., the one thing she missed the most other than family and friends, was cheese bread.



When a friend told her that she could find tapioca flour and make her beloved cheese bread from scratch, she never thought it would be the beginning of an entrepreneurial adventure. Silvana started making it for her family, taking it to social events and eventually began getting orders. One day, her husband came home and saw her rolling 200 cheese bread rolls by hand, and told her she had “better start a business!”, and Brazilian Oven was born.

She knew she had a unique, tasty product, and, even though she was advised not to change a winning recipe, she believed she could make it better. She tried many experiments – even returning to Brazil to visit relatives and to make the product by hand and test. Because Brazilian cheese bread was a new product concept in the U.S. and she wasn’t sure how the American palate would accept it, she decided to try the market with a minimal investment.

She looked for a commercial kitchen in Kalamazoo and found Can-Do Kitchen where she was advised that her product would be well-received by those with gluten, wheat and yeast allergies, along with the Latino community already familiar with cheese bread. She received her licenses and starting production, but somehow, when she made them in the commercial kitchen, she felt she was losing the “touch” that made her original cheese bread special.

She contacted the MSU Product Center and was put in touch with a food scientist that had never tried Brazilian cheese bread before but understood the chemistry behind it. After Silvana explained the desired results, the Product Center team was able to identify the problem and suggested some processing changes as the solution.

Brazilian Oven cheese breads are currently produced in a shared commercial facility in Portage. The product line is available in all Whole Foods stores in Michigan and select Indiana and Illinois locations along with several health and specialty retailers in west and southwest Michigan. Silvana is currently looking for distributors and looking forward to having her own facility to increase production for nationwide distribution.

“My advice for someone in the food business – if you are struggling with any aspect of your food product or processing, do not spend time and resources experimenting with trial and error,” states owner Silvana Quadros Russell. “There are local MSU professional food resources available to efficiently help resolve your issues. With their help, I was able to further develop my product.”



“Silvana has experienced very good sales growth with her unique product. She is in 30+ stores in the upper midwest and increased demand necessitated reworking the recipe. Her ability to ask specific detailed questions of the Product Center Food Science team facilitated a quick response. Her willingness to adapt suggestions and pleasant manner make it a pleasure to work with her.”

Mark Thomas

Innovation Counselor, MSU Product Center Food • Ag • Bio



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