

# Chili Dawg's Foods of Fire

## Specializing in 'Sweet Before the Heat'

From its early days as a home-based business, to its steady growth across a multi-state region, Chili Dawg's Foods of Fire has been turning up the heat at parties, cookouts, tailgates and barbecue competitions with its peppery product line. Leading the list of hot sellers are several habanero pepper spreads, seasonings and jerky created from homemade recipes by company owners Tim and Shawn O'Dell.

"We both love fiery foods," Tim explained. "Our first product was a sweet and spicy habanero pepper spread that my wife and I created in our kitchen, which we used to give away as Christmas gifts and bring to tailgate parties. Our friends and relatives kept encouraging us to market the product, so in 2005 I founded the company with my brother, Shawn."



Professional barbecue teams from across the country use Chili Dawg's habanero pepper spreads as a glaze on meat during competitions. "You know you're doing something right if professionals use your product," Shawn emphasized.

Photos courtesy of Mike Markoff

The brothers attribute their early success to the University of Nebraska Lincoln's Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program (FEAP) where they learned to navigate regulatory hurdles such as designing a product label that follows Food and Drug Administration guidelines.

"We went through a three-day seminar that taught us how to take a food product from concept to market, which is what we did with our habanero pepper spread that featured an apple lemon blend that we named Hablemeno," Shawn recalled.

Through the FEAP program, the O'Dells located a contract manufacturer and began marketing Hablemeno at trade shows in Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Texas, including the American Royal in Kansas City, which is the world's largest barbecue competition.

"At the first American Royal show we attended, we sold more than 60 cases of our Hablemeno pepper spread in two days," Shawn recalled. "Seeing the customers respond to that one product encouraged us to keep going and develop new recipes."

Over the years, the brothers continued operating out of their homes as they added several new flavors to their line of habanero pepper spreads, including Strawbanero, Peachbanero, Habricot and Razbanero, which can be used as a spread for toast, a glaze on meat, or a barbecue sauce.



Shawn (left) and Tim personally taste test products from outside suppliers before approving them for sale in their retail store called The Dawghouse. "We offer a selection of products from all over the country that you cannot find locally anywhere else," Tim explained.

In 2014, the brothers achieved a major milestone when they opened a retail location and warehouse at 1940 Ridgeview Road in Blair, Nebraska, where visitors are encouraged to "try it before you buy it." The store attracts customers from throughout the Midwest with its wide selection of hot and spicy products and barbecue supplies, including grills and smokers.

In addition to its retail location, Chili Dawg's Foods of Fire are available at major barbecue trade shows and online at <http://www.chilidawgs.com/>. Products are also sold at selected Hy-Vee, Family

Fare, Fareway Foods, and Affiliated Food grocery stores throughout a 14-state area, as well as convenience and specialty stores.

The O'Dells credit their partnership with First National Bank as instrumental in their company's success.

"First National Bank has been with us through all the ups and downs, the valleys as well as the good times," Tim shared. "They meet with us regularly about our business and are always asking us about our needs. They have been very supportive and a great partner."

Supporting the local businesses that support our community.

