

Homemade Dog Food Business

Rudy Green's Doggy Cuisine delivers homemade goodness, quality, safety--and becomes a business venture for a dog lover.

Story and Photos By Karri Sandino

If you want another choice when it comes to feeding your trusty farm dog or saavy barn kitty—you're not alone.

Karla Hass, founder and president of Louisville, Ky.-based Rudy Green Ventures, read the food labels, decided she wanted something with a more wholesome quality--and created Rudy Green's Doggy Cuisine.

How Rudy's Began

Haas' homemade dog food venture began out of necessity—to help her sick dog, Rudy.

Tips for Starting a Food-Making Venture

Here's what Karla Haas, president of Rudy Green Ventures, says can help get you started in a food-making venture: Believe in your product Seek out experts Write a business plan Determine small-scale profitability Find a commercial-grade kitchen

Help for Small Businesses

Haas worked extensively with the Small Business Development centers in Lexington and Louisville. With their help, Haas overcame one of the biggest challenges for a commercial food business: Access to the commercial-grade, USDA-approved kitchen.

Find Your SBA Center

The U.S. Small Business Administration offers a map with links to local SBA offices.

Top "It was the summer of 2006," she says, "Rudy, one of my strays, was almost 13 years old and had developed ulcers.

"The vet told me, 'You have to cook for him.' So I began making food for Rudy and my other three adopted dogs."

Later, when she went back to serving the dogs canned food, Haas says they looked at her as if to say, "How could you?"

Believing that homemade was better—and what the dogs wanted— Haas started to make their dog food herself en masse since it couldn't be bought anywhere.

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Timing Worked for Rudy's

Then, if timing is everything, Haas had it all.

About the same time she was making plans to begin selling her product to some local stores, the bad news about many mainstream pet foods was making headlines.

"I was positioned to go to market when the pet food scare happened," she says. The scare resulted in thousands of pets dying or becoming severely ill from eating many common brands of pet food.

Love of Dogs Drives Rudy Green's Business Plan

It wasn't too hard for Haas to go out of her way to feed her dogs—nor make healthy meals for her growing canine clientele.

"I've spend about 25 years serving on boards for animal rescue organization," she said, "I've been an animal resuce worker my whole adult life."

It doesn't hurt that Haas loves to cook, too.

Beefy Rice is one of four varieties of Rudy Green's available.

What's in Rudy Green's

It's one of the only pet food items that's also human-grade, made from 100% real meat and veggies--no "meat meal," by-products, dyes, preservatives or fillers, Haas explains.

But don't let that fool you; it's designed with your dog's palate in mind!

Rudy Green's comes frozen without additives. You can thaw it in your refrigerator or microwave--serve it warm or cold, as a topping to your dog's dry food or as a special treat.

Find Rudy Green's

Haas distributes to more than a dozen locations in Kentucky, as well as several in Ohio, Indiana and Tennessee.

Top"Two of my true passions are dogs and food," she says. And Rudy's combines both!

Shelters Share in Rudy's Profits

"One of the reasons I created the company was so I could funnel some money into nonprofits established to help animal shelters," she says.

Local shelters receive a significant portion of her sales.

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Rudy Green's Canine Clients

Ask Haas about her clients and she lists a few of their names: Blackberry Whine ("He's one of my a champion dog customers," she says.)

Smiling Slim

Sneakers

Gracie

Rosie

Karla loves customers who bring their dogs into the pet stores she visits. It's the way she recruits new clients, describing her primary marketing activities as grass roots in nature: Setting up in-store displays at grocery and pet stores

Passing out Rudy Green's samples

Attending dog-related events

Meeting potential clients face to ... nose

"I get to meet the dogs, give out samples and explain to people what it is," says Haas, "People become my customers because they get to know me."

And because they really love Rudy Green's!

Arriving in Nashville for an event, Haas saw a woman getting into her car—with a yellow lab.

"I introduced myself and gave her a sample for her dog to try. She called the next day to tell me that when she put the sample down for her dog, he licked the container competely dry. Later the dog searched for the empty container in the

trash and ended up carrying it around with him!

About the Author: Karri Sandino is associate web editor with Hobby Farms and Hobby Farm Home.

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