

Fatman's Beef Jerky: Proving Once and For All, Nothing Beats Quality

Rick Robey, the founder of Fatman's Beef Jerky, shares his small business story with Kabbage.

From the Cattle Ranch to Square One

For 30 years, Rick Robey and his family were in the commercial cattle business, with an average of 20,000 animals to care for and 60 to 80 employees. "It was a high risk, high reward venture," says Rick, who found himself facing the risks after 30 years of rewards. Due to an unwelcome shift, Rick and his family were no longer able to bottle feed and raise baby calves. It was time for them to find a way to start over.

"I was involved with a packing house during the cattle business days, and became aware of the great potential for making money in the jerky business," Rick told us. After the doors closed on their business of 30 years, Rick came home with some beef rounds and asked his wife to experiment with beef jerky. Her first [Fatman's Beef Jerky](#) recipe, Green Chile, was a hit with friends and family – and thus began their journey into another business venture. Rick, his wife, and three kids worked day and night for months before hiring their first two employees.

With a Little Help From Friends and Family

When they first began their new venture, the Robey family didn't have any financial support from lenders. With a difference of 30 to 45 days between the time they paid for commodities and received payment from customers, there was always a money crunch. Luckily, they were able to get through the initial bumps of starting their own business with cash loans from friends and family. As their sales numbers went up, they were able to supplement their finances with small business loans from high-interest lending companies.

The biggest help came from New Mexico Economic Development and the town of Hagerman, NM, which received a grant to build an industrial park. Fatman's Beef Jerky has become their first tenant in a new plant specifically designed for jerky production.

Simplicity With a Twist of Flavor and Uncompromised Quality

Even as meat prices skyrocketed, Rick Robey and his family refused to compromise the quality of their product, which led to a steady growth of customers. There's no doubt that

there's a huge market for beef jerky, a shelf-stable, high protein snack or meal replacement for people on-the-go.

“One thing that prompted me to consider jerky production was knowing that I could produce a better product than what was being offered as the only choice to millions of customers in convenience stores,” says Rick. Because of this, they decided to market to farm and feed stores, hardware stores, and private vendors who didn't answer to large corporate conglomerates who buy up shelf space.

With no added preservatives, Fatman's Beef Jerky's fourteen distinct flavors speak for themselves. There's something for everyone and the flavors were created in response to people's suggestions and ideas – which is why it's not surprising that they're such a big hit. Fatman's quality speaks for itself, so they stick to very simple packaging with labels colored to designate each flavor.

Marketing “experts” have tried to convince us that we'd grow exponentially with fancier packaging, but we've decided to continue with the image of a specialty, “home-grown” product.

Currently, Rick and his family are working toward a goal of being completely self-sustaining financially and eventually growing big enough to sell their business. Who could blame them? After nearly 40 years of running two businesses, they've earned their retirement!

Kabbage Takeaway

Starting a new small business is possible at any stage in your life, as long as you believe in your product. Whether it's your first business or your second after you've had 30 years of business experience under your belt, don't expect an overnight success. Rick's last words of advice? “Never tire of exploring new options in marketing, and as you listen to the “experts,” take care that you don't compromise the quality of your product, for in the end, quality always wins.”

[Berrak Sarikaya](#) is a natural conversation driver. In 2010, she found a way to bring all of her passions together as a freelance writer and community builder. She has focused on small businesses across the U.S., helping them amplify their online presence and drive their online marketing strategy.