

# Santa Maria-Style Products Sell Worldwide

In 1981 Susan Righetti founded bringing it to life," she says, "My Susie Q Brand, "the original maker father hired a Hollywood set mural- of artisan foods capturing the flavors ist to decorate the walls of the res- of Santa Maria Style Bar- beque, a regional culinary favorite rooted in the Santa Maria Valley."

Hailing from two local Swiss-Italian ranching families, the Minetti's and Maretti's, Susan names her mother and her grandmother as her greatest culinary influences and credits the time spent with family and time working in her parents restaurant, the Far Western Tavern, with deepening her interest in, and love be inspired by of, good food and big dreams.

"It was fun to see my parents' en- Central Coast have always been thusiasm for creating a concept and home for me," the Orcutt resident



restaurant and my mother shared her recipes with the chefs."

Like her parents, Susan made her own dream a reality by studying Agricultural Business Management at Cal Poly and learning from Italian cookbook author Pamela Sheldon in Northern Italy. When it came time to start her own company, there was no question as to where it would be based or what it would

be inspired by.

"The Santa Maria Valley and the Central Coast have always been home for me," the Orcutt resident

says, "This is a great place to raise a family, and the sense of community is so strong."

"I really can't imagine operating a business anywhere else," Susan continues, "Susie Q Brand is deeply rooted in the culinary heritage of the area, so being here is really what made it happen in the first place, and being here continues to be the inspiration behind what we do."

When Susie Q first launched, the specialties were pinto beans and an accompanying seasoning blend. Over the years the variety of products grew to include not only the signature Santa Maria Style Seasoning, but also several bean seasonings, a Santa Maria Style Salsa, Citrus Rib Glaze, Beef Jerky, and Strawberry Pie Glaze (another Santa Maria staple). You can even purchase gift packs, aprons, and grilling tools for your own backyard

get together.

Santa Maria Style Barbeque has been enjoyed by locals for nearly a century. Even President Ronald Reagan and First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson have sampled and savored our native fare, according to the Susie Q website.

In fact, Susie Q, in its quest to pay tribute to its hometown methods, has become so well known and well loved that chef Bobby Flay even visited the family for his program "BBQ with Bobby Flay" on the Food Network. Apparently the staff on the show loved the food so much that even a vegetarian assistant had to have a sample!

"It's very gratifying to create something that people enjoy, and to learn where and how they are using it. We get a lot of personal feedback, and

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## Susie Q

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we love it. We create food to share food, and that personal connection makes it all the more enjoyable, whether you're across the dinner table or across the world," says Susan, "Also, we take a lot of pride in helping foster the traditions and flavors of authentic Santa Maria Style Barbeque. It's important that we, as a community, maintain these traditions. If we can cultivate devoted fans of Santa Maria Style Barbeque, these are the people who will make a point to come to our region to support it."

In an effort to further cultivate this relationship, Susie Q offers a website that not only features their catalog of products, but also information about Susan, the story of the brand, and popular recipes. And although proud to uphold tradition, Susie Q recently unveiled new packaging.

"The original package served us well for many years," says Susan, "but this year the time seemed right for a change and we decided to establish a fresh new look."

So does Susan ever get tired of our indigenous barbeque? "No, I'm always up for Santa Maria Style Barbe-

cue!" she says, "It's been ingrained in me since I was a child growing up at the ranch and around the Far Western Tavern. It's like pasta in Italy to me- it's a way of life. But it's not all I eat. I'm very interested in different cuisines, and in what's going on in the world of food. I think it's important that, as we nurture the traditions of Santa Maria Style Barbecue, we also keep pace with contemporary tastes."

To see all that Susie Q Brand has to offer, visit [www.susieqbrand.com](http://www.susieqbrand.com)

*Rebecca Ross Klosinski reporting*