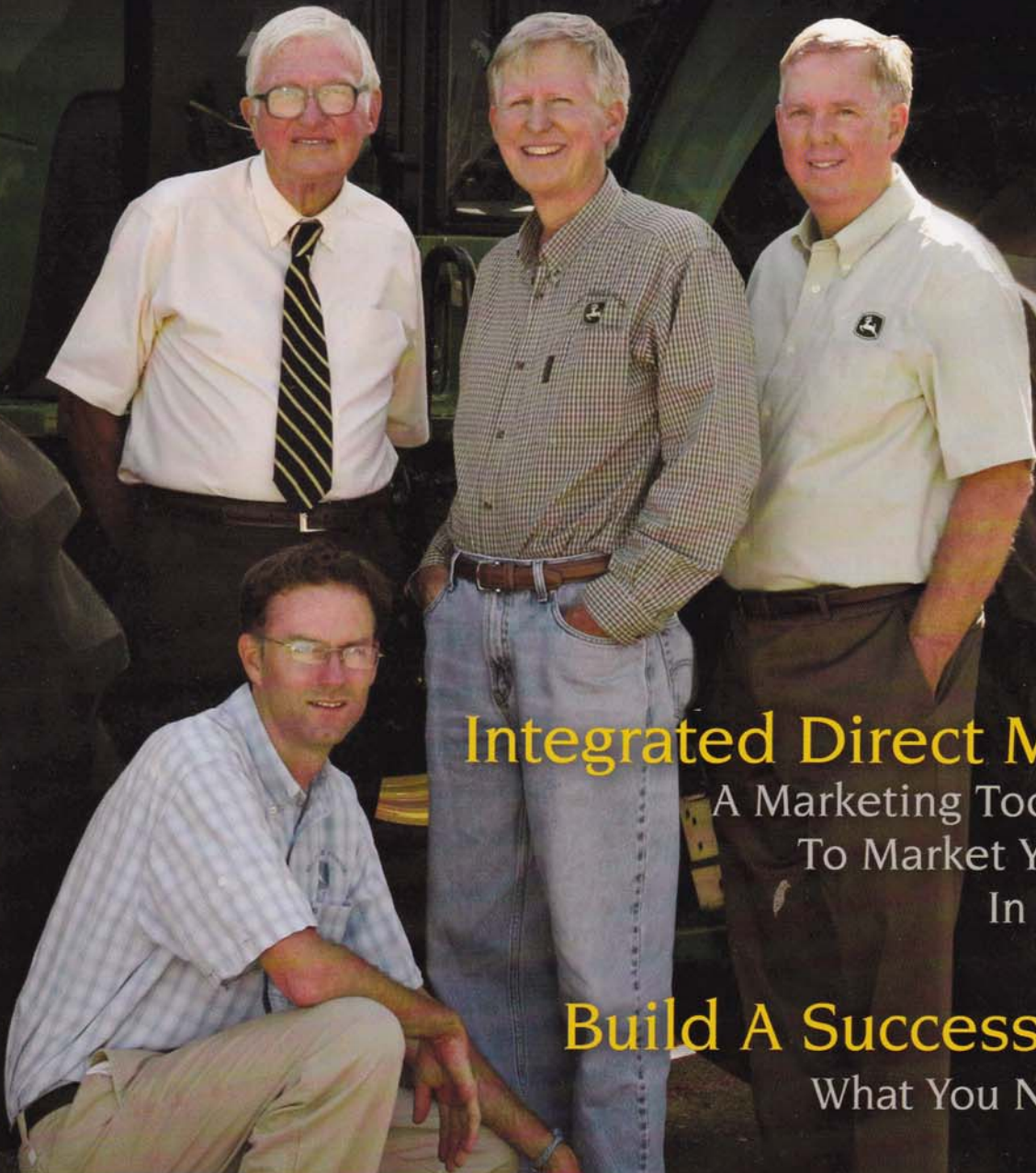


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PROFILE |

John, Julie and Chad Bidegain - Cowboy BBQ



Tell us about your organization.

I was a farmer's daughter that married a farmer, which I had told myself that I would never do. But it must have been right since we have worked together almost every day, for thirty-eight years, on many different ventures in addition to farming. I am blessed to have such a supportive partner and best friend in my husband, John. Farming has many ups and downs, as does every business, so we were always thinking of new ways to add to our income on the down years. We mainly raise alfalfa, but we have done everything from braided garlic to designing a line of Western iron furniture. We have always had the attitude that if we thought of an idea, we were sure we could figure out how to do it even if we had never done it before.

The BBQ part of our venture started when our children were in grammar school. There were always fundraisers and at that time the biggest school money maker was the annual BBQ and Carnival. We were always in charge of the BBQ part. As we would be cooking all day out in the sun, we kept thinking that there had to be an easier way of doing this. It wasn't

until our children were out of school, that we came up with a BBQ idea. We built a simple, indirectly heated, Ferris wheel design BBQ that could be loaded with meat to cook. Since it was indirectly heated, you just left it alone to do its thing, which made it easier to entertain and enjoy friends without standing over a hot BBQ.

Q: What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

Love what you do. If you truly enjoy your work, it will show in a profitable business. When we built our first BBQ and created a line of sauces, we did it out of a love for cooking, eating and having friends over.

Q: What has been your favorite moment as a business owner?

We enjoy going to Trade Shows and doing cooking demonstrations because we like to talk and interact with people. You can learn so much about how you can improve your business. Our favorite item to cook was the tri-tip sandwich which we would sell at the Trade Shows so that people could taste how delicious the meat was, when cooked in our units.

In 2005, Chili Pepper Magazine from Fort Worth, Texas, contacted us about advertising in their magazine. They told us about the Fiery Food Challenge that was held in Texas and wondered if we would be interested in entering our sauce. We entered our "Sweet and Smokey Meat Moppin' Sauce" and our "Sweet and Spicy Jalapeno Relish". To our surprise, we won first place on our BBQ sauce and third place



on our relish! We also won "Best Overall New Product" and that's when we thought that this could really be a second business for us.

At this point in the business, we had to get serious about how we packaged our food items. Our son, Chad, did some research and located jars...then there was developing our logo, designing labels, creating the nutritional labels and bar codes. It finally all came together.

Another favorite moment came when John decided to use our BBQ's and sauces to enter some local Rib Cook-Offs. He marinated the ribs with our relish and cooked them slowly, then finished them off with our sauce. He won first place both times! After that we got busy with orders, gift pack ideas and improving our website.

Q What is your biggest challenge as a business owner?

It is a huge challenge, when just getting started in a new business, to wear all the hats....or try to do it all. You soon have to learn to let go and trust the work to someone else as your business grows. While John was busy farming, our son Chad and I were in the kitchen chopping and canning as much as we could to keep up with the demand for our new relishes.

Our counters were full of jars and we soon realized that we were over our heads trying to keep up with the canning, so we took the next step and found a manufacturer; this was one of the smartest things that we did. Now the business was starting to be fun again. Marketing, talking with buyers, giving cooking demonstrations, and of course, the cooking and coming up with new products was something I really enjoy.

Q What do you think is the most important thing a business leader can accomplish?

To be successful, it is important to know every part of the business. You may be a great organizer and leader, but if you haven't gone through every step of your business, it would be hard to tell someone how to do the job.

We have always had the attitude that if we thought of an idea, we were sure we could figure out how to do it even if we had never done it before.

Q Where is your organization headed?

We now have five products, including a second relish which is a Cranberry-Orange Jalapeno and a seasoning rub called Salty Brone. We would eventually like to see our products sold in larger gourmet chains such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe's.

I was thinking that our next project might be a cookbook using our sauces and relishes.

Q What piece of advice would you give a new business owner?

Don't be afraid of starting something new. Don't say, "Oh, I could never do that!" Just take one step at a time and it will all come together. ★

Award-Winning Cowboy BBQ Products

2005 | First Place, "Sweet and Smokey Meat Moppin' Sauce"
Fiery Food Challenge, Texas

2005 | Third Place, "Sweet and Spicy Jalapeno Relish"
Fiery Food Challenge, Texas

2009 | First Place, "Sweet and Smokey Meat Moppin' Sauce"
Fiery Food Challenge, Texas

2009 | Second Place, "Cranberry-Orange Jalapeno Relish"
Fiery Food Challenge, Texas

Third Place, "Cranberry-Orange Jalapeno Relish"
America's Zesty Best Food Show, Los Angeles, California