



Angela Ichwan

ARICO NATURAL FOODS

When Angela Ichwan sampled the gluten-free snack foods her 11-year old autistic niece was required to eat, she was unimpressed by their taste, texture and nutritional value. Ichwan (pronounced EEK-won) figured she could come up with something better. The result was Arico Natural Foods, featuring gluten- and dairy-free cookies and more recently all-natural cassava chips for people with special dietary needs.

Ichwan started the Beaverton company with her husband, Hermanto Hidajat, in 2004.

Arico, which means delicious or rich in Spanish, was named the fastest-growing gluten-free cookie company in the country in 2006 by SPINS, a market research group for the natural products industry. A year later, the small company became the world's first carbon-neutral gluten-free snacks company, and according to Ichwan, growth was in the triple digits between 2006 and 2007, with 2008 sales thus far growing at a quadruple-digit rate from last year. Arico products are available at all Whole Foods Markets, New Seasons stores and other natural food outlets.

Ichwan believes in giving back. Five percent of the company's earnings are donated to support women's rights protection under international humanitarian law. The company also plants a tree in an endangered species habitat for every new store that carries their cassava chips.

Ichwan, 36, came well-prepared to the natural foods arena. She left her native island of Java in the late 1980s to study food science at the University of California at Davis, earning her master's degree at Cornell University in 1993, and later an MBA at the University of Michigan while working for the H.J. Heinz Co. and later the Kellogg Co.

"My dad is a doctor," she said, "and I've always had that passion, that concern, that deep down, health is important, and it is affected by what you eat."

Offered a chance to be a chief executive officer of a nonprofit organization, Ichwan left Kellogg to work for Market Matters Inc. That's where her social consciousness emerged. In South Africa, the group developed training and workshops for small-



medium-sized enterprises, aiding in the development of business practices.

"There, the women are the backbone of the community," Ichwan said. "We gave them tools. We presented to them: 'You've got a product. How do you market it? How do you package it?'"

When she returned to the U.S., Ichwan, who confesses she's a label-reading junkie, met up with her niece. She also checked out the snacks her niece ate.

"I'm like, 'Hmmm, this does not taste great,'" she said.

She realized, "There is so much nutrition that I can put into the product, and make it taste good."

She and Hidajat, a Javanese information technology engineer she met in New York, moved to California where both have family. They got married in City Hall in San Francisco in 2004 and decided to drive to Portland.

They were drawn to Oregon, excited by a place associated with organic gardening, sustainable foods and environmental concerns. Back in the Bay area after a quick weekend, they stuffed their cars with belongings, drove north, moved into an apartment and started a business.

"We're both entrepreneurial spirits," Ichwan said. "Our mission in life is to improve the way people eat. It's pretty sad to learn that we're the richest country in the world, however, we are also plagued by the problems of obesity and diabetic concerns. I think these are preventable. It's a matter of educating consumers, and educating parents to make the best choices for their children. The good choice, the right choice — that's what we want to provide."

—Holly Johnson



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