

Local Entrepreneurs Look to Grow China's Taste for Barbecue

portside.portofportland.online/2018/09/local-entrepreneurs-look-to-grow-chinas-taste-for-barbecue/



Almost four years ago, friends Kevin Shirley and Omar White started experimenting to create a tasty barbecue sauce made with natural ingredients. The two “soul brothers” met at church and had similar Southern roots.

“We wanted to make a healthy sauce,” said Omar. “We had cookouts all of the time and were putting barbeques together with our moms’ recipes.”

Their brand – American Soul Brothers, a melding of soul and sauce, launched in 2015 after the two developed six barbeque sauces under the label. Their Vancouver, Wash. based business is relatively small (their sauce is only sold locally in stores such as Fred Meyer, New Seasons and Market of Choice and a few Seattle shops) with a goal of growing into new markets.

The two were introduced to partners of the new Portland-based exporting venture hoopla Global earlier this year and are marketing the sauce in China. hoopla Global was created with the intent of eliminating entrepreneurs’ export challenges around tariffs, logistics and fears of not getting paid. In partnership with the Chinese e-commerce platform JD.com, hoopla Global handles warehousing, shipping overseas, paperwork and final delivery to the Chinese consumer.

“They take away the red tape,” said Kevin of their work with hoopla Global. “We deliver our sauce and don’t have to change the labels or worry about logistics.”

Does that mean American style barbeque has caught on in China?

“We’ve been researching the Chinese market and the middle class wants American products because of the quality,” Omar said. “As Americans, we take for granted the whole experience of a barbeque—friends and family gathered around, wearing the apron, and enjoying a potluck meal. They want to replicate that experience in China.”

hoopla Global is introducing other Northwest products such as nut butters, dried berries, healthy snack foods and nutritional supplement items to the growing Chinese middle class. The goods are being shipped via the BNSF Railway from the Port’s Terminal 6 and put on ocean carriers in Seattle and Tacoma bound for Asia.

Kevin and Omar hope to sell 17,000 bottles of their sauces and spreads their first year in China.

“What’s next – Southeast Asia or Africa? We don’t know where hoopla will take us next,” Omar said.