



## FEASTING FANCIES. by Ralph Lupoli

### Fresh Herbs

Each spring I go through the same thing; I start thinking about growing fresh herbs. I check out all my clay pots and make sure they're clean and I purchase new potting soil and fill each pot.

I then go on a field trip to the Farmers Market and buy lots of fresh herbs in little pots and carefully bring them home and plant them in my prepared pots. I put them in a window I specially designed for this purpose with shelves going up the inside of the window with blinds between to control the light. I water very carefully and pinch to get even growth and follow all the rules. Within two month all dead! No fresh herbs!

I search out the biggest and freshest bouquets of basil and other herbs at the markets and carefully bring them home and place them in vases of water and try to keep them as fresh as possible for as long as I can. I carefully take the basil leaves and place them in bundles and carefully wrap them in towels and plastic wrap and put them in the freezer, sometimes it works and I can keep them fresh for several months. I not only do this with fresh basil but spend hours preparing other herbs as well. It's a constant battle to have fresh herbs in a City apartment without going to the bank to pay for the little packages the supermarkets sell.

I think I have found a solution - "Darégal Gourmet" is a company that grows fresh herbs, chops them and then flash freezes them. They are 100% natural, contain no added salt and stay fresh for up to three years in the freezer.

The company is run in the United States by Charles Darbonne, who is the fifth generation involved in the family business. After earning a business degree from Bordeaux College in France and working for three years as a financial auditor, he joined the company in 2003. He worked for three years as the marketing manager and then created the retail branch of

Darégal within the United States now known as Darégal Gourmet.

"My family has always been farmers; our farming activity dates back more than 400 years. At the end of the eighteenth century there were many changes due to the industrial revolution so my great, great grandfather decided to try something different by growing fine herbs for aromatic and culinary purposes; he founded Darégal in 1887 and started to sell herbs at the local markets. Darégal is the abbreviation for Darbonne (our family name) and regal: (from the French verb "regaler": to feast, to treat)".

My family has been in the same region for centuries, Milly-la-Foret has a tradition of growing herbs. Geographically it is a basin with small mounts all around it, providing a microclimate. The weather is very consistent and perfect for herbs; not too hot, not too cold, not too rainy, not too dry. The soil is rich, unpolluted, and very fertile. Milly-la-Foret is part of the Beauce region, south of Paris, which is by tradition an agricultural and farming area.

My grandfather saw the potential of selling herbs, so he decided to bring this small farm into business, meaning a real agricultural company. One of the first steps was therefore to add production capabilities to the small farming process, by introducing tractors. My grandfather added new equipment even though at that time it was a common conception that tractors could pack the soil by their weight, and thus kill the ground's fertility, never the less he decided to introduce more advanced methods to produce dry herbs.

The transfer of power from my grandfather to my father also happened due to technological input. My Father studied engineering and thermo technologies. He was very interested in new machineries and technologies. He went on thinking about freezing herbs. At that time, vegetables started to be marketed

as frozen vegetables, so he imagined creating "frozen culinary herbs". Lots of research and modifications were necessary, as the process of freezing corn and peas would not apply to a leaf of basil or parsley. So he studied further and invented a specific process. He designed the technology and machinery to freeze herbs. He built the equipment himself and patented the machines.

Since my grandfather transformed the business from a farm to an agricultural business and my father transformed it from an agricultural to an industrial company, I see myself bringing it to the level of a service company. Which would be the logical evolution! I can see us as being flavor facilitators selling culinary solutions."

What a great story! It's inspiring that one family over a period of years has transferred knowledge from one generation to the other and building on and expanding that knowledge to cre-

ate a company that provides a great product. Darégal Gourmet, Frozen Herbs, can be found in Stop and Shop, A & P and D'Agostino. You can choose from Cilantro, Basil, Parsley, Dill and Oregano. They have also created three blends; Original Blend - basil, oregano, rosemary, thyme, onion and garlic, Grilling Blend - thyme, rosemary, savory and Italian parsley, Italian Blend - Italian parsley, basil, oregano, red onion and thyme. Buy one of each and have a garden in your freezer.

I tried the Italian Blend. I placed several teaspoons of this mixture into the bottom of a large bowl, I added more basil and parsley and a pinch more of oregano. Early in the day I chopped about one pound of Roma tomatoes into a small dice, placed them in a bowl and

salted them a bit and allowed them to sit. I cooked pasta and heated several tablespoons of olive oil almost to the smoking point. Working very quickly, I poured the hot olive oil over the herbs, poured in the tomato and the tomatoes and juices and tossed all together. You may want to adjust the mixture of herbs to please your taste buds. It was really very good.

I don't see using this for a pesto, since you need a lot of basil, but perhaps for one or two servings it may work. Hurr! Next experiment! Enjoy this great product, but don't throw away your knives.

If you have any questions or need more information please write me at this newspaper or e-mail me at [RAaskRalph@aol.com](mailto:RAaskRalph@aol.com).

