



Maria Reig Silvestre, Mariana Foods

Maria moved to the U.S. from Spain in 2006 and immediately ingrained herself in the business world. She worked as a consultant helping companies from Spain enter the U.S. market. Although she was living in the U.S., she wanted to continue to feel close to her home country. She wanted to add parts of her heritage to the melting pot of American culture. She soon began working for the government to help manage the promotion of exports from Spain to the U.S. She worked as an international trade manager and was exposed to many industries, but among all of them the one she liked most was food. “I am a food lover; I love eating a lot.”

Maria moved to Miami and had her first child. She ended up leaving her job at the Spain Chamber of Commerce to focus on her family. She loved her career, and she realized that there was a way to continue doing what she loved without having to work in her job – she was going to build her own company. “Although I worked in the field of export for many years, doing it on your own is a completely different mindset.” Maria decided that she was going to create a company that specialized in combining two of her favorite things, her home country of Spain and food. “When you are out of your country one of the things that you miss most is the food.”

CURATING A TASTE OF HOME

At the end of 2019, Maria and her friend Ana created Mariana Foods. But less than a year later, her friend backed out because she was running another company and didn’t have the time to commit to a new company. Maria was left to run Mariana Foods on her own. “I had to do everything, from marketing, to selling, and sometimes even delivery.” A few

months later, the pandemic hit, and Maria had to reevaluate how to run her business altogether.

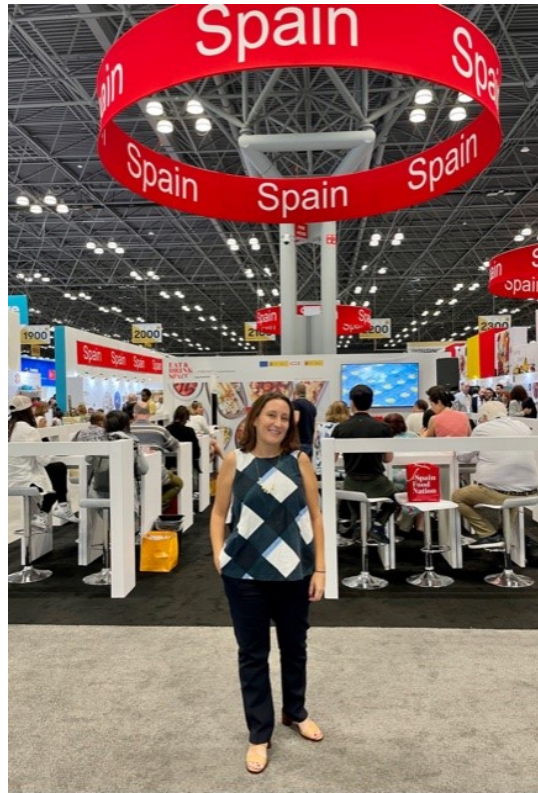
Maria already knew what type of products she wanted to sell, “My company sells products that are not typically found in a grocery store in America but represent the culture and heritage of Spain. I want people to buy my products and feel like they are buying good food.” She took it step by step and started selling her products on different marketplaces such as Amazon and Etsy. Maria has master’s degrees in international commerce and digital marketing, and she built a website so that she could sell directly to customers from there. Her website and audience were growing daily, and she needed more warehouse space to store goods and more products to meet the needs of her customers.



INVESTING IN FUTURE SUCCESS

Maria met Ascendus when she entered her business into the SBA Community Navigator program in Miami. She got a loan through the Southern Opportunity and Resilience Fund for \$25,000 and used it towards owning her own warehouse and increasing her supply of products from Spain. She also wanted to ensure that her customers could get their products quickly and could stay connected, so she invested in a mailing service, launching a subscription service, and a digital marketing campaign to attract even more customers. “I am grateful for Ascendus because they trusted me and my business. It’s not only the money, but it’s also that they saw me and my company and believed that I could do it.”

Maria says that her business keeps her connected to her heritage and her home country, “I have no family in the U.S., no support system, so it is very nice to have that link with Spain.” Since receiving her loan, Maria has been able to hire a team to handle her marketing and move to a bigger office. She has also been able to grow her portfolio of products and create another line for her business focused on wholesale and corporate gifts. “I put all my heart into this. I hope that in the future I can grow the company and reach a level where I can hire more staff and bring even more authentic products from Spain to the U.S.”



Source: Ascendus website: <https://www.ascendus.org/client-stories/8707/>

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