

Alumnus launches allergen-free snack startup

October 2 2013, by Joe O'connell



Rob Dalton, a 2007 graduate of Northeastern, and his wife Nicole. They recently launched 88 acres, a healthy snack food company geared toward people with food allergies.

Shortly after they started dating in 2010, Robert Dalton and his wife Nicole had a dinner to remember.

What began as a romantic meal for two ended in a trip to the emergency room after Dalton's meal was cross-contaminated with nuts. He is deathly allergic to peanuts and [tree nuts](#) and went into [anaphylactic shock](#).

Dalton, a 2007 graduate of Northeastern with a bachelor's degree in history, would be OK following the scare. But the experience started a conversation between he and Nicole about what kinds of foods were available to people with allergies.

"It was Nicole's first experience with food allergies," Dalton explained, "and it really sparked us to learn more about what snack foods were on the market that were not only safe enough for me to eat but also marketed effectively and tasted good enough for Nicole to enjoy as well."

After identifying an opportunity in the healthy snack food space geared toward the growing number of people with food allergies, Rob and Nicole decided to start their own business.

Following 18 months of planning, the couple created and sampled thousands of products and then launched 88 acres on Sept. 22 to coincide with a Kickstarter campaign. Their venture is named after the 88-acre farm on which Nicole grew up.

"We create healthy snacks free of the top eight food allergens that are crafted with simple ingredients and designed for all to enjoy," Dalton said.

Less than 60 hours after their 30-day Kickstarter campaign went live on Sunday, they surpassed their initial \$20,000 funding goal. With more than three weeks remaining in the campaign, the couple aims to continue to build on its initial success. The money raised will help fund the initial production run of 88 acres' first product line—three flavors of granola bars.

Dalton said they ultimately want to offer snacks for customers' food needs throughout the day. "We definitely have pretty grand visions for

what we want to be," he said, "but we have to start small, show success, and then build off of that."

After graduating from Northeastern, the budding entrepreneur has become heavily involved with IDEA, the university's student-run venture accelerator, which helps students and alumni create, develop, and accelerate new businesses through coaching, mentoring, and funding. 88 acres received \$10,000 in gap funding from IDEA and was also accepted to MassChallenge, an accelerator program that connects entrepreneurs to the resources they need to be successful.

In addition to IDEA's mentorship, Dalton said he and Nicole have received great advice and feedback from talking with other entrepreneurs, and they hope to reciprocate by helping future entrepreneurs. "We are not going to be a venture that comes in, gets some gap funding money, and then goes off into the distance never to be heard from again," Dalton said.

More information: www.kickstarter.com/projects/8...vomite-healthy-snack

Provided by Northeastern University

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