

Sibling Bakers

Two sisters keep the ingredients for success stacked in pretty jars. By **Marti Buckley Kilpatrick**

When close-knit sisters Lisa Sorensen and Suzy Sultemeier bake for their families and friends, they don't follow recipes. Messing with bags of flour, boxes of baking soda, or measuring spoons is out of the question. Even as devoted from-scratch bakers, they prefer directions as simple as "dump" and "stir."

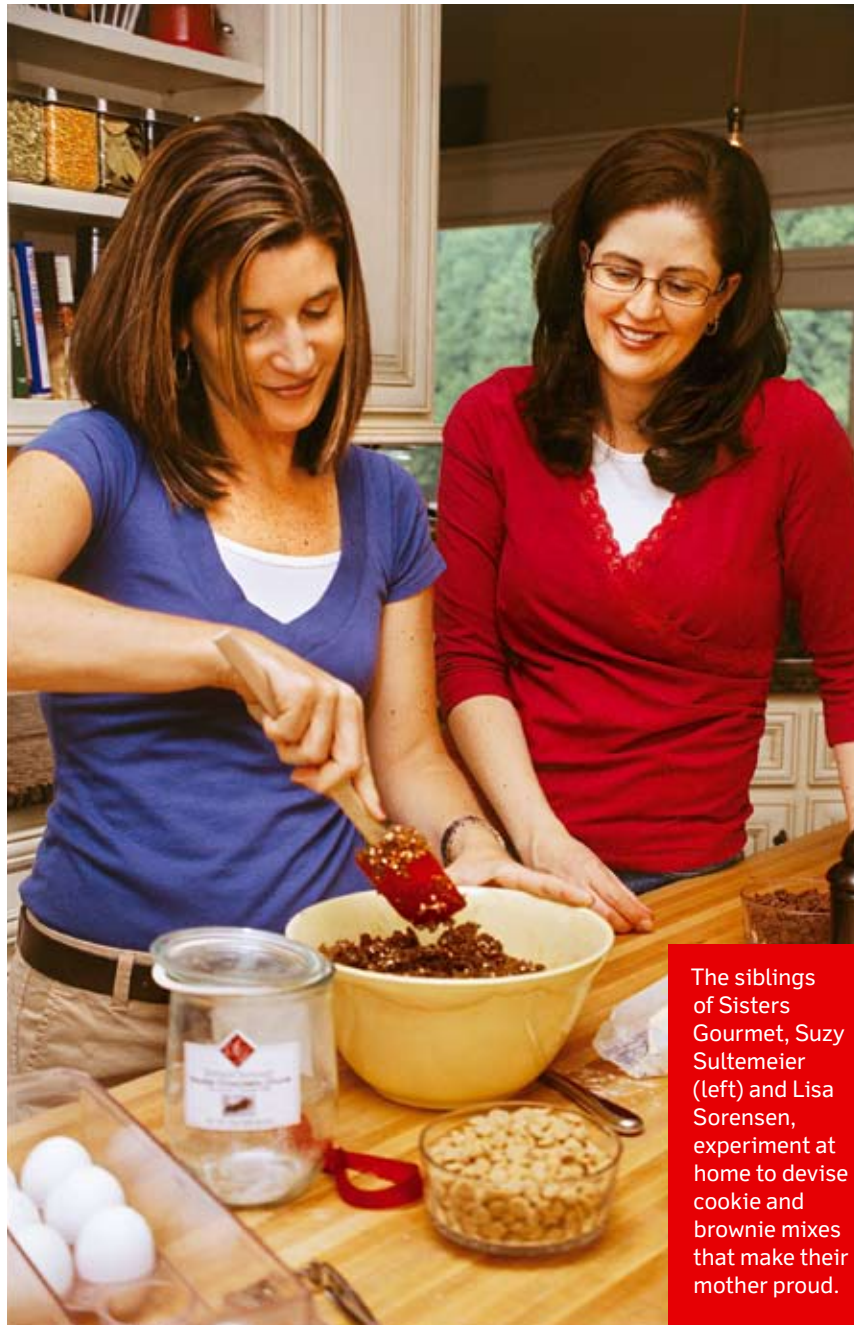
By taking care of baking's more precise details in advance, these enterprising siblings enjoy the act of making cookies and brownies as more of a social occasion, chatting away while sweet aromas waft. That's the easygoing philosophy behind Dacula-based Sisters Gourmet, their everything-in-one-jar business.

Easy Does It The atmosphere in Lisa's home kitchen—the company's de facto headquarters—is tranquil, breezy, and spiced with pleasant conversation. There's no worrying or scrambling for ingredients, even with as many as seven children present. Lisa has three kids and Suzy four, each an accomplished cookie taster.

As the oven heats, Lisa overturns (read: dumps) a mason jar of Sisters Gourmet Million Dollar Cookie Mix, while her business partners, husband Rob and sister Suzy, watch. Neatly arranged layers of chocolate chips, oats, flour, sugar, and cocoa powder cascade into a bowl. "It's so easy," Lisa says. "You just add eggs and butter." After a few turns in a stand mixer (read: stirs), the gooey dough is ready to spoon onto baking sheets.

"I just love homemade baked goods," Suzy says, pitching in to help. "Lisa and I learned to bake when we were little by hanging out with our mother, who would always say, 'Good things come to those who bake.' We still like hanging out together in the kitchen, now with our husbands and kids and Mom too. We even named one of our product lines—Just Like Mom's—to honor her."

Starting From Scratch Sisters Gourmet mixes, found online and at specialty stores, typically



The siblings of Sisters Gourmet, Suzy Sultemeier (left) and Lisa Sorensen, experiment at home to devise cookie and brownie mixes that make their mother proud.

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SUZY SULTEMEIER



call for only a couple of added items. That and their pleasing looks make them popular gifts. The siblings got the idea while running a booth at Coomers Craft Mall in Stone Mountain.

“It was our little crafts shop that started it all,” says Suzy, who shipped her handwoven baskets to Lisa to stock the booth even after relocating to Houston for her husband’s job (she returns to Dacula often to stay involved in the cookie business). “While we were doing that, we saw a magazine article showing the dry ingredients for soups measured out ahead of time and layered in jars. We thought we’d try it with cookie mixes, because cookies are our favorite food.”

“Soon we were getting calls from Coomers every two or three days saying that they had sold out of our cookie-mix jars again,” Lisa says. To keep up with demand, the sisters devised techniques for filling the jars in ever larger numbers while also diversifying the variety of mixes offered. They eventually closed their crafts booth to concentrate entirely on Sisters Gourmet.

Right at Home New product development still takes place in Lisa’s kitchen, where the whole family participates in taste testing. Actual production and packing has moved to a nearby industrial park. On a good day employees fill as many as 10,000 jars, going through



FAR LEFT: Dry ingredients such as flour, sugar, oats, and chocolate—decoratively layered in a glass jar—look pretty as they wait for someone to make a batch of Sisters Gourmet cookies. **LEFT:** Youngsters (from left) Tyler, Sydney, and Rob Sorensen are veteran taste testers for the cookies their mother and aunt bake. **BELOW:** The end result, a plate of freshly baked cookies, usually doesn't last very long.

Cookie Quandary

Lisa and Suzy must have a favorite cookie, right? That's like asking which of their children they like best. "I don't have a favorite, except maybe whatever I'm eating at the time," Suzy says. Lisa obliges with a quick answer, but then goes on to rave about others until she names everything they ever produced. "I eat cookies pretty much all the time," she confesses. "I like them all."

tons of nuts, rolled oats, chocolate, and other ingredients.

For Lisa, family life remains a top concern. "I'm trying to do this and be a stay-at-home mom," she says, "but when sweets are involved, it can be difficult to separate job and family. As 'the cookie lady,' I get volunteered a lot to bring goodies to the kids' functions. That's okay, though, because I really like doing this." ●

Sisters Gourmet: www.sistersgourmet.com or 1-877-338-1388.



Try These

Here are a few of the ready-to-make mixes Sisters Gourmet packs in pretty jars (prices range \$6.99-\$14.99).

- **Triple Chocolate Chip Cookies:** brimming with milk-, dark-, and white-chocolate chips (and inspired by Suzy's triplets)
- **Cinnamon Snickerdoodles:** moist and chewy, loaded with cinnamon chips, and covered with a cinnamon-sugar blend
- **Peanut Butter Oatmeal Cookies:** the sisters' version of a classic combination
- **Chocolate Overload Brownies:** rich and fudgy with giant chocolate morsels
- **White Chocolate Cranberry Cookies:** made with sun-ripened fruit and whole grain oats