

## Shawnee Couple Score Touchdown with All-Natural Edamame dips



By **JILL WENDHOLT SILVA**  
**The Kansas City Star**  
**February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010**

In the weeks leading up to the Super Bowl, the Hass Avocado Board is predicting football fans will consume 80 million pounds of guacamole on game day, almost double the amount snarfed down last year.

But surely Team Avocado has caught wind of a rival dip poised to tackle the nation's ever-growing mound of chips?

Over the past year, Dean and Anne Panovich of Shawnee have drafted their own team of family and friends to help boil, blend and package batches of Soy-Zen-Zay, a zippy line of dips made from edamame, a nutritious, bright-green Asian soybean with a nutty, buttery flavor.

The dips — low in sodium, free of preservatives, gluten and dairy and made with non-genetically modified beans — sell for \$4.99 at 15 Whole Foods markets in Kansas City, Denver and Boulder, Colo. Locally, the dips also are available in Cosentino Markets, select Hy-Vee stores, Nature's Pantry, Green Acres and the Community Mercantile in Lawrence.

On a cold, gray January morning, Anne pours a batch of frozen, shelled green soybeans imported from China into pots of boiling water. As the water returns to a boil, clouds of steam cause condensation to form on the kitchen windows of a ranch home remodeled to serve as a certified production facility. When cooked to al dente, the beans are drained and pureed using two immersion blenders suspended from a makeshift PVC-pipe contraption Dean devised to replace a hand blender and ice cream scoops. After several minutes of whirring, he dips a plastic spoon into the steaming mixture and offers up a taste from his first batch of edamame-cucumber dip.

"See how it still has ridges? Did you feel the jagged edges?" Dean says moments after rolling the puree around on his tongue. "We're big on texture. It should be the texture and consistency of cream cheese, not creamy like mayo. We're getting closer. If we go too far, it kind of tastes like mayo. Some people say, 'I'm sick of hummus' — I think because it has that flat feel on the tongue."

After blending the puree to the proper consistency, Dean pours it into a stainless-steel funnel the size of an old-fashioned megaphone and flips a red lever. Warm dip flows out a stainless-steel spigot into a plastic tub with the team logo. He slaps it with his palm to activate the seal.

Touchdown?

"Anybody can create something good in the kitchen, but once you tub it and try to get a 10-week shelf life, everything changes," Dean says.

## **The dream team**

Anne grew up on an Iowa soybean farm, yet she was the one who introduced her father to edamame.

Although the Midwest is a leader in soybean production, the bulk of American-grown beans are a variety typically fed to cattle. A Japanese variety known as edamame (pronounced ed-ah-Mah-meh) are handpicked and squeezed from fuzzy pods that grow on stalks. The Japanese most often eat edamame out of hand as a snack.

Only 5 percent of soybeans grown in the U.S. are processed into supermarket food products, but the number of soy-based snacks continues to grow, according to Linda Funk, executive director of the Soyfoods Council, which is based in Iowa.

Funk is eager to convert Midwestern farmers to the joy of soy but notes that "fresh soybeans are like green beans. Once you pick, you have to blanch and flash freeze or use right away, so finding processing plants is the sticky wicket."

Five years ago, when Anne, a former high school math teacher, began to research recipes, she had trouble finding one for an edamame dip. She developed recipes and flavors using frozen soybeans and tested them out on family and friends. Eventually, she worked with Kansas State University food scientists to work out production, food safety and packaging requirements.

So far, Christina Auch of Whole Foods has run into only one other commercial edamame dip.

"It's an educational process, and they've done a good job educating consumers," Auch, the store team leader at the 91st Street store in Overland Park, says of the Panoviches. "People wonder, 'Is it a guacamole?' 'Is it a hummus?' But once they taste it, they're really hooked on it."

Recently, Food Network star Alton Brown demonstrated an edamame “hummus” on one of his cooking shows.

“That helped us,” Dean says. “All of a sudden, people were saying, ‘I saw ’ Alton Brown do that. I’ll buy it.’”

Meanwhile, the Panoviches have found themselves doing in-store demos next to charismatic chef Yahia Kamal of Yummy’s Choice, a line of Mediterranean-based dips, spreads and pita chips, including a traditional hummus.

“Everybody is just really helpful to one another. The local producers help each other. It’s been a neat experience,” Dean says. “We just want each other to do well.”

Says Kamal: “I don’t see them as competition. Their product is neat and tastes good. There’s a lot more room (in the market).”

Soy-Zen-Zay’s motto is “One little bean and a dream.”

“If someone tastes it, they’ll buy it,” Dean says. “We’ve figured out what our profile is.”

So far, the dip is catching on fastest in health-conscious Colorado. Edamame has more protein, calcium and iron than any other bean. A 2-tablespoon serving of Soy-Zen-Zay’s original flavor contains 70 calories, 6 grams of fat and 120 milligrams of sodium.

### **‘A good time to start a business’**

The Panoviches, both 42, have always dreamed of becoming entrepreneurs. But the couple have two young daughters, ages 6 and 8, and many friends and acquaintances questioned the amount of risk they were taking on in unstable financial times.

“I didn’t want to be at a Super Bowl party and see another edamame dip and say I had it but didn’t do anything with it,” says Dean, who walked away from a job as vice president of deployment for a health care start-up at the height of the recession. “It’s actually a good time to start a business. Companies are willing to work with (small start-ups). Look at farmers and how they make their living. Starting a company is not that hard.”

At one end of the production kitchen, the shelves are lined with jugs of rice wine vinegar and olive oil. One-third pound of soybeans, a bit of tahini (sesame paste) and a few seasonings go into each tub.

“It’s labor-intensive and pretty tiring, but the recipe is very simple,” Dean says. But, “the more natural it is, the more difficult it is to get the flavor everyone wants. It’s a little bit like making wine. We’re a little at the mercy of the garlic or the cucumbers. Their flavors depend on the time of year, the temperature and the size of the batches.”

So far, the line includes original, cucumber, garlic, spicy Asian pepper, ginger wasabi and spicy garlic flavors.

“And people give us ideas for new flavors all the time,” Dean says.

He grabs a pair of black sunglasses from the kitchen — necessary protective equipment when they make the new ginger-wasabi-flavored dip.

“That ginger-wasabi makes us cry like a baby. These,” he says, motioning to the oversized sunglasses, “they’re like big Ray Charles glasses.”

Customers started combining flavors, then creating innovative recipes for bruschetta, breakfast burritos and scrambled eggs. Dean likes to combine ginger-wasabi with shrimp to make wraps.

Leia Gardner, 21, a college student who works part time for Soy-Zen-Zay, dollops the spicy garlic spread on cheeseburgers.

"I wish we could take credit for a lot of these ideas, but people go home and experiment," Dean says.

Meanwhile, the Panoviches have five more soybean-based products in the research-and-development phase while continuing to market their current line.

Later in the day, Dean hops in his car and drives 10 hours to Denver for five days of demo-ing.

"You have to get out and tell the story," he says.

---

This recipe is one of Dean Panovich's favorites featuring Soy-Zen-Zay Ginger Wasabi Edamame Dip.

### **Shrimp Wrap**

Makes 4 to 5 servings

1 pound shrimp, shelled, deveined and thawed

4 to 5 (8-inch) wraps

2 tablespoons butter, melted

1/2 teaspoon dried basil

Black pepper, to taste

1/3 cup pine nuts

Lettuce or spinach leaves

1 (8-ounce) package shredded cheddar cheese

1 (10-ounce) container Soy-Zen-Zay Ginger

Wasabi Edamame Dip

Saute thawed shrimp in butter. Season with basil and black pepper. Add pine nuts. Cook until shrimp is cooked through. Spread 2 tablespoons edamame dip on each wrap. Layer with lettuce or spinach, then shrimp/pine nut mixture. Sprinkle with cheese and wrap. Serve immediately.