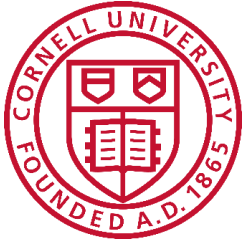


# Cornell Cooperative Extension | Erie County

May 2021

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*This article is the fourteenth in a series focusing on vendors who are selling their wares at the Western New York Welcome Center's **Taste NY Market**. Thank you to Linda and George Lund, for meeting with me to share the Babcia's Pierogi story along with some business and marketing experiences, tips and strategies.*

## Spotlight on Babcia's Pierogi

In early May of 2021, I met briefly with Linda Lund and her colleague, Rona Paul, at the East Aurora Farmers Market. As a follow up to that discussion, I toured the Babcia's Pierogi operation within the historic Broadway Market at 999 Broadway in Buffalo, mainly visiting with Linda's husband and pierogi business partner, George.

As George began showing me around Babcia's Pierogi's retail and production operations within the Broadway Market, he explained that he and Linda have been in business since 2001. Linda said that's when they first started taking pierogi orders from friends. By 2005 she had begun experimenting with some of the flavored fillings that make Babcia's Pierogi unique.

George said when space became available in the Broadway Market, he and Linda realized that with a lot of renovation, modernization, and modification work, the location would be great, both as a retail venue for Babcia's Pierogi and as a production facility. Their facilities include a commercial kitchen, freezer, and packaging and distribution location to serve retail customers and to support wholesale, private labeling, fundraising events, and fairs and festivals.

Linda explained that Babcia's Pierogi LLC officially began in May of 2015 as a sole proprietorship owned by Linda, with George equally involved in running the business and daily operations. They currently have 9 employees and bring on additional seasonal employees as needed. The current line includes 24 flavors of pierogi as well as a wide assortment of Polish deli foods.

As they say on their web page, Babcia's Pierogi was created by Linda F. Lund and George Lund out of their "love & passion for cooking." Linda says she has been making pierogi since she was old enough to stand in the kitchen with her family. Recipes used in their business were handed down within their families. Linda has built on those traditions by expanding the culinary concept of the traditional Central and Eastern European filled dumpling well beyond the historic Polish, Slavic, Ukrainian and Russian

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forms. Pierogi, by various names, have long been consumed as both meal staples and as comfort, celebratory, and festival foods. The main ingredients in the unleavened dough are flour, eggs and water. Various traditional versions add mashed potatoes or curd. The dough is rolled or pressed thinly and folded over a wide variety of savory or sweet filling options to form a half circle or triangle, depending on whether the dough is cut into a circle or a square. The seams are pressed together to seal the filling inside. Decorative crimping helps maintain the seals as the pierogi are simmered or gently boiled, drained and then fried or baked in butter (or as Linda recommends, butter with a little vegetable oil to reduce scorching). Butter, bacon crumbs, sour cream, fried onions, or for sweeter versions, fresh fruit or fruit preserves are often used to garnish or top the pierogi as they are plated and served.

Modern pierogi are prepared and served both fresh and, since the invention of refrigeration and freezers, from packaged, frozen versions. Babcia's Pierogi products are packed and sold frozen. This allows for a scale of production and variety that would be impossible if each variety was freshly prepared and immediately marketed. Plus, Linda says the frozen pierogi maintain their quality "for at least a year" when kept properly frozen.

As the "home of WNY's largest and most unique variety of Pierogi," Babcia's Pierogi's assortment of pierogi provide palette pleasing options in both traditional styles and Linda's many unique stuffing variations. George said Linda is the real cook, perfecting flavor combinations from the traditional farmer's cheese, sauerkraut, potato and farmer's cheese, and potato/cheddar styles to Buffalo wing, jalapeno, sausage/asiago/spinach (Rona's favorite), apple, blueberry/cheese, plum, stuffed banana pepper, beef on 'weck, and their trademarked Pizzarogi™ pierogi among many, many others. The Babcia's Pierogi web page, [www.baciaspierogi.com](http://www.baciaspierogi.com), includes photos and descriptions of many of the varieties along with information about where Babcia's Pierogi can be purchased and news about upcoming events and festivals.

While Linda dreams up and perfects the recipes and flavor combinations and manages the retail outlet and sales and marketing, George serves as operations manager keeping equipment running smoothly, designing and even manufacturing tools and equipment, building and modifying the retail and production spaces and equipment to meet the needs and marketing goals, and dealing with the details of procurement, product packaging, sanitation, and managing the workforce. George has a technology background both from college and from his time as a high school technology teacher. His background and love of cooking combine well with Linda's creativity, food preparation, and marketing skills.

During my visit, George and Babcia's Pierogi team member, Kristina Eaves, were making a batch of sausage/asiago/spinach pierogi. Babcia's Pierogi are machine-sheeted, filled and folded but there's still a lot of hand labor. George said there are just two manufacturers of commercial pierogi machines in the U.S. Their machine was purchased in New York City. With George's careful calibration, the machine turns out a very thin dumpling with room for the generous dollop of filling that Babcia's Pierogi are known for. As Kristina loaded trays of pierogi, periodically calling for George to transfer a full tray to the freezer rack, the racks slowly filled with thirty-six pierogi per tray. Watching the pierogi-making process, we can imagine how difficult it would be to produce anything like the volume of pierogi that Babcia's cranks out with a manually-rolled, cut, hand-filled, and folded process.

*INSERT pierogi machine clips / combine with George's audio*

After the pierogi production, George and Kristina switched over to work with their new barrel-fermented sauerkraut for use in their pierogi and other products. As they transferred the 'kraut into perforated five-gallon buckets, packing and draining the sauerkraut and getting it into more manageable containers, Kristina began using an "arm rake" tool which George recently had custom made to help get the sauerkraut out of the big blue barrels. This scale of sauerkraut production is new to the business.

*INSERT Sauerkraut video clips*

George had long made their sauerkraut in traditional crocks. The team is still working out the details of the production process at the scale of the big blue drums.

*INSERT cart and freezer video clips*

As George rolled a rack of pierogi-filled trays through the market and into the freezing and packaging room, he continued to describe the many elements of the business from the retail, indoor and take-out space at the main entrance of the Broadway Market, to the growing list of wholesale outlets, fairs, and festivals.

Currently, Babcia's Pierogi sells at the East Aurora and Hamburg Farmers Markets. Private labeling of products is another growing area in the marketing mix. While COVID-19 impacted marketing and sales in many ways, online sales options, take-out, and drive-up fundraising events were strong during the pandemic. Of course, not being able to market at the Erie County Fair and the New York State Fair was a huge impact. George said that while the Taste NY markets don't move a lot of their product, they still help build brand recognition and awareness. Linda said sales venues are listed on the website and currently include 14 area stores.

George explained that their pierogi pricing philosophy is based on charging a fair price for a well-stuffed, highly flavorful, thin-crust style that people will come back to time after time. With their premium fillings and thin dumpling shells, the price point is higher than some other brands that use less filling and thicker shells. He said people return to their products because of the quality and especially the flavors in more varieties than any other New York State pierogi maker.

Linda said her "marketing experience has been self-taught, by reading as many books as possible and staying current with the latest trends." She said, "I've learned to listen to the customer and try to fulfill their needs, as much as practical." Marketing pivots during COVID have included additional emphasis on their web page along with social media including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Online sales have helped. She said, "COVID struck at the worst possible time, two weeks before Easter and right before our concession season was about to begin. We had to immediately change to offering online ordering and curbside pickup." Another marketing pivot has been the promotion of fundraising sales through local churches and organizations. Linda said this brought desperately needed income to organizations and helped Babcia's Pierogi "get through the crisis." Linda said "We are exploring many different opportunities for the future. We are patiently observing the changes due to COVID before making any big decisions."

Thank you Linda and George Lund and team members Rona Paul, Kristina Eaves and Gloria Mis for taking the time to visit with me about Babcia's Pierogi and this Buffalo-based business' line of locally

produced, traditional, signature and specialty pierogi and other products and menu items available at their Broadway Market locations, at area markets including the Western New York Welcome Center, online through Doordash, Grubhub and Takeout Taxi, at area farmers markets, events and festivals, and, if the COVID-19 pandemic recovery continues at the 2021 and future Erie County and New York State Fairs. Gift certificates are also an option.

Babcia's Pierogi is another example of how family-run small businesses in Western New York and throughout the State are continually adjusting to changes in the economy and markets and is one of the many businesses working to make locally grown, manufactured, or processed and packaged foods, beverages, goods, and services available to consumers in the region.



Taste NY at the Western New York Welcome Center is operated by:

**Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Erie County**

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