



How a case of hepatitis ended up making health-food history

By Nancy McAllister

When most people get hit with a serious illness, they don't usually spend their recuperation time inventing products. But that's exactly what food entrepreneur Gregory Sams did in 1981.

A bout of hepatitis forced him to stay away from his natural-foods business and rest at home. "Resting" turned to brainstorming for Sams: He wanted to come up with an alternative to the hamburger, something that would be healthy and easy to make. The only burgers available in the world at that time were the kind that had said "moo" in a former life. There was one catch: Sams had been raised by vegetarians and had never tasted a real hamburger. But he didn't let that stop him. Even though he didn't know beans about burgers, after experimenting with his long-suffering wife and taste-tester Sandy for about three months, he found his pot of veggie-gold.

He sold 2,000 packets of his VegeBurger mix in the first three weeks after debuting it at a market. With adjustments, he turned the VegeBurger into a frozen-foods product and was soon selling 250,000 burgers a week.

At age 39, Sams retired from the food industry and began working on other passions—chaos theory and fractals—which he may never have had the time or money for if it hadn't been for his invention of the humble VegeBurger.

His success includes a message for all of us: Slowing down and focusing on a single, simple goal can yield great results.