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Call it food for the skin: Local co. looks healthy

By Donna Goodison

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A 64-year-old Newton grandmother is taking on industry giants Procter & Gamble, L'Oreal and Unilever in the skin care aisle at local retailers.

Florence Sender expects \$20 million in first-year sales from her new Be Fine Food Skin Care line. The 12 products contain 181 natural ingredients, including common foods such as avocado, beets, cocoa, mushrooms, pineapple, pomegranate, rice and sugar cane.

"Just like when you sit down to a meal and eat a combination of foods to nourish your body, there's a combination of foods to nourish your skin," Sender said.

Mushrooms in the neck cream tighten skin, for example, and pomegranate in the moisturizer helps it regenerate, according to Sender.

"We are a basic skin-care line," she said. "We're not going to tell you that we put something in a jar that's going to take away your wrinkles. We believe that if your skin is clean and kept moist, you'll look healthy."

Manufactured in New Jersey, the products retail for \$15.99 to \$26.99 at CVS. Be Fine also will come out with single-serve packets in August, and products for other body parts - hands, feet, breasts and thighs - next year.

Sender is no business novice. In 1976, she started Nibbles International, a natural cheese company sold in 1988 for \$10 million. After that, she spent seven years at MIT's Sloan School of Management, where she founded the Entrepreneurship Center, taught MBA students and worked on research products. Sender also is chairman and CEO of FoodLogic, which develops natural and organic food and bath products exclusively branded for retailers including Kroger, Target, Kmart and JCPenney.

Be Fine's food ingredients resonated with CVS Corp., spokeswoman Erin Pensa said. CVS launched the products in January at 3,000 stores and will have them in all stores by next month, she said.

"We're always looking for products to add to our beauty mix that have a unique point of difference," Pensa said. "The philosophy of Be Fine is different from a lot of what's available at mass retailers."

Be Fine products also will be shipped in July to Hannaford Bros. supermarkets, San Antonio-based H.E. Butt Grocery and Toronto-based Shoppers Drug Mart.

"With every new venture - no matter how good your idea is, how much you raised, how good your management team is - the biggest challenge is demonstrating that you can sell your product," Sender said. "This we were able to do out of the gate, and at significant volume."



Florence Sender, chairman and CEO of FoodLogic, holds up some of her Be Fine skin care products and the natural ingredients they contain at the company's Newton headquarters. (Staff photo by Angela Rowlings)