

Local firms make a big impression at Trade Day during the South Beach Wine & Food Festival

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by [Julia Neyman](#)

Local food importer John Woram is used to dealing with high-end tortellini manufacturers and boutique truffle harvesters from Italy. But he was shocked when Martha Stewart stopped by his exhibitor booth at last week's South Beach Wine & Food Festival Trade Day.

"Martha Stewart herself came by and talked to me for five minutes about truffles," said Woram, owner of Miami-based **Ciao Imports**. "Twenty minutes later, her producer was back with a camera, and we gave him a box of assorted truffles that Martha Stewart will review. A distributor can go their whole life and not get that chance."

Woram was one of several South Florida vendors to strike partnerships, find national distributors and expose their merchandise to high-end users at the Feb. 23 event. About 7,000 restaurateurs and vendors browsed exhibits from more than 60 food and wine exhibitors, almost half of which were local.

"This is the first year I was really excited to see some major national talent walk the floor of trade day," said Randall Rubin, the festival's director of restaurants and exhibitors. "There were also a lot of specialty buyers and prime line distributors here to find high-end products."

A churrasco steak display from Pompano Beach-based **Stockyards** garnered attention from several local restaurants and caterers, including Miami's Barton G. Stockyards' brand manager, Joe Stak, said local restaurants were happy to find a distributor who could quickly deliver fresh cuts of veal, beef and pork.

"The great thing is that if they saw something they liked, they could have it the next day," he said. "Hopefully, we'll gain some new customers. For some of our existing customers, it opened up their eyes to the finer things we do."

Small local startups also were able to capitalize on the hype surrounding Trade Day. National media film crews followed Food Network superstars as they sampled sweets from Coral Gables-based **Jennifer's Homemade** and Boca Raton-based **Really Good Cookies**.

"The contacts I made and who I was approached by were invaluable," said Christine Najac, owner of Really Good Cookies. "People who own stores, directors and operators of hotel chains ... this was something I couldn't just do by knocking on doors."

Rubin said the festival's focus on boutique and specialty products made it the perfect venue for niche companies such as Miami-based **Mojito Co.**, which makes ergonomic cocktail muddlers, sugarcane sticks and customized mojito glasses.

Representatives of Minneapolis-based **Ardea Beverages** said Trade Day's health-conscious attendees were the perfect niche market for their Nutrisoda line. Ardea founder Joe Heron said the local response Nutrisoda garnered at Trade Day will help the brand expand its distribution from Broward and Palm Beach County Publix locations to grocery stores in Miami.

"The best way to expand is to get consumers to taste your product, so if it goes on the shelf, it moves quickly," he said. "We are a premium soda and we primarily target people with a more discerning pallet. The South Beach Wine & Food Festival is very big for us."