

Food shows could help pull in more dough

•**Sonya Jones:** Owner of Sweet Auburn Bread in Atlanta, a bakery specializing in Southern-inspired fare.

•**Coaches:** Paula Deen and Barry Weiner.

The situation: Jones' little bakery has experienced some large financial setbacks. In 2008, a tornado shut down her street — and restricted access to the bakery for about two months. During the recent downturn, she had to contend with cost-conscious consumers who didn't want to buy baked goods. "Just when I think I've just got it going, something else happens," she says.

Even though the economy is rebounding, Jones says she still is on unsteady financial footing.

"I've just been keeping my head above water," she says.

Jones has reaped extra revenue by selling baked goods at local farmers' markets, but that hasn't alleviated her money concerns.

"We have seen people shut down all around us," she says. "I feel the worst is over, but you never know."

Deen and Weiner's advice: Jones should determine what revenue streams work well financially, then pursue similar paths.

"If the farmers' market worked for you, then you should look at other comparable venues," Weiner says.

In addition to selling at farmers' markets and county fairs, Jones should tap into larger venues — such as The Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show in Atlanta, a foodie-friendly event that highlights Southern food — to expand her customer base.

"You want to put your product in front of the people who care about it," Weiner says.

"And you don't have to advertise for customers, because they're there."

Target Atlanta-area markets and shows to keep the expansion economical, the coaches say. "You don't have travel expenses," Deen says.

While Jones should keep overhead as low as possible, there is one area where she should never skimp: her products. A high-tech website and flashy marketing should always take a back seat to producing tasty, high-quality baked goods, the coaches say.

"You want to make a better product and give better service," Weiner says. "The more business that you have, the more money that you'll make."

Because Jones is so cash-strapped, Deen and Weiner suggest she find sources of free financing, such as grants or business competitions that offer cash prizes.

Once Jones gets her cash flow going, Deen cautions Jones to still live frugally.

"I put everything back in my business," says Deen, who started her catering business with \$200. "It was three or four years before I got my first paycheck, which was a couple hundred dollars."

Also, be sure to set aside money for taxes. "I knew there was one person I couldn't screw over, and that was Uncle Sam," Deen says.