Apple and red clover, plum and lavender, elderberry and wild ginger: these are just some of the fruit butters created by Mill Pond Cannery and Preserves in partnership with the George Brown Food Innovation Studio (then known as the Culinary Studio).

With the idea of turning their belief in the local food movement into a profitable business, Donna Carmichael and business partner Dave Smythe took their fruit butter plan to food scientist and George Brown professor, Winnie Chiu.

Fruit butters are not common on the market largely because, as Carmichael explains, they need to cook more slowly and require more fruit than a jam. But Carmichael and Smythe saw the market potential of this old-fashioned preserve. As did Chiu: “Consumers are getting smarter. They’re more aware of what’s in products, and a key attribute of fruit butters is their very simple ingredient list.”

The Mill Pond fruit butters are made with Ontario fruit, sweetened with honey, acidified with apple cider vinegar, and flavoured with an indigenous Canadian herb. And that’s all they contain.

Under the guidance of Chiu and Professor Moira Cockburn, and with funding from CONII (Colleges Ontario Network for Industry Innovation), OCE (Ontario Centres of Excellence), and NSERC (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council) culinary students developed recipes that fit the company’s mandate of local and natural ingredients and created formulations that could be made in large batches. Carmichael appreciated the hands-on approach to research she found at the college. “Moirra and Winnie’s team was enthusiastic, creative, supportive and practical.”

Mill Pond’s six George Brown-developed fruit butters hit the shelves in 2009, and Carmichael reports that they are now available in many fine food stores including McEwan Foods, Culinarium, and Healthy Butcher.

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WINNIE CHIU, FOOD & INNOVATION RESEARCH STUDIO