



**ROBIN BROOKS**, Brooks Food Group

## Staying Efficient in a Competitive Business

**I**f there's any doubt about how competitive the food services business is, just ask Robin Brooks, CEO of Brooks Food Group. Her Bedford, Va. company provides frozen foods to restaurants such as Burger King, Red Lobster, and Olive Garden. The company, which has 360 employees, last year brought in revenues of \$107 million.

Brooks spent most of her professional career doing business valuations for Arthur D. Little and Touche Ross. "I enjoyed the work, and all the different players in each transaction, but I got burned out," she says. In 1995 her husband sold his interest in a food manufacturing company, and together they went shopping for a business to buy. "Frank had his food industry contacts, I had mine with lawyers, bankers, and equity investors."

They settled on Golden West Foods, then a subsidiary of McCormick Foods. Part of the appeal, says Brooks, was that Golden West Foods was already doing business with Burger King. It also had a reputation for good product quality. As the business grew, Brooks was able to add chicken products to her menu and expand her customer list, signing up well-known firms like Ruby Tuesday and Wendy's.

Providing customers with superior products is only the beginning. "You have to keep evolving and investing in technology and R&D to stay more efficient, because margins are so thin," Brooks says. "The one thing I don't want to hear from my employees is that we're doing it this way because we have always done it that way."