

How To Start A Vegan & Gluten-Free Bakery From Scratch with Noel Martinez

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage, food businesses, about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill. And today I'm talking with Noel Martinez, but before I start talking with Noel, I do want to preface this episode by saying that. Up until this point, I've had guests that have quite a bit of experience running their home food businesses, usually at least two years of experience.

But when I started this podcast I envisioned getting a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives, including having some brand new entrepreneurs on the show. And that's because someone who's starting out today might face different challenges or opportunities than someone who started say a decade ago.

And this show is really targeted towards entrepreneurs who are just starting their cottage food journey. And it might be a bit easier for them to relate to someone who is currently in the early stages of growing their business. Someone like Noel, who started his cottage food business, [Mami's Bakes](#) just a few months ago.

Noel lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and sells Cuban-inspired diet specific baked goods. And by diet specific, I mean baked goods that are gluten-free vegan sugar-free et cetera. I spoke with Noel earlier this year, and I know that his baked goods have been quite popular and have commanded some pretty high prices.

He's used some online marketing techniques to grow, but has also been managed in a job while running his business on the side. So I'm looking forward to learning more about his current successes or struggles. And with that, welcome to the show. Noel. Nice to have you here.

Noel Martinez: [00:01:39] Thanks, David. Nice to have you too.

David Crabill: [00:01:42] So Noel, can you cover well let's I know you have kind of a cool story behind this. It's called Mami's bakes. Can you just share a little bit about why you named it that.

Noel Martinez: [00:01:55] Yeah. Actually Mami's bakes is, based on What, I used to call my mom, which is basically the Spanish word for mom, Mami. And, I actually lost her, June of 2019. And, she has been a big inspiration in my life. And so, I decided to name it after her.

David Crabill: [00:02:20] Yeah. So, I didn't realize it was Mami's bake, so I mispronounced it there, but, uh, thanks for the clarification and yeah, that's very cool to hear that you are doing this in honor of. her, and can you just take us back to, what got you to decide to start this business?

Noel Martinez: [00:02:40] Um, it started, after her passing, um, I. it took some time and then I needed a second job. I already had a part-time job, with Amazon and, I needed to supplement that. And I had gotten a job taking care of an autistic, gentlemen. And so I was

doing that for about six months. but his mom came up to me one morning and said that, she was retiring and she needed to take my job, to kind of make ends meet for herself.

So I was pretty much left, Trying to figure out what I wanted to do after I had left a job at a nursing home, a twelve-year job at a nursing home as an activity director prior to the Amazon job. So, I had been baking, my baked goods, just, for family and for the holidays around Christmas.

And they were very well received and I'd been baking gluten-free for 20 years before that. and I feel like my mom just pushed me to try it. And I said to myself, why don't I, Actually go for it. Maybe that's what I need to do is something for myself. I've always had jobs where I take care of others. so maybe I need to try to do something kind of more for me.

David Crabill: [00:04:07] It's interesting to hear that you say that you're doing this for yourself? Because I have noticed that a trend with cottage food businesses is that, and really any. Food entrepreneur is they tend to be very service oriented. And so I heard you were working in the nursing home and I was just wondering if you feel like your service oriented nature has kind of led you to wanting to, support people with food.

Noel Martinez: [00:04:33] Absolutely. I feel that, I'm passionate about baking and cooking. I mean, for me, it's always been more on the cooking end. I've always loved to be in the kitchen, which is something I think I get from both my dad who was, a cook at a club in Cuba many, many years ago. he has since passed on as well before my mom did, but, you know, and then I grew up with both parents who were always in the kitchen, basically, both my parents did a lot of cooking and I think that kind of was passed on to me.

And, it's something that I picked up and enjoyed and I. It started with cooking. And then I think the baking really started when I had to go gluten free myself because of celiac disease. And so, I started baking then whether it was bread or cake, cupcakes, whatever. And over the years I've done more and more of it.

When I think about it, I'm doing this for myself on one end, but it's like, you can never escape who you really are. And I think I'm always going to be the kind of person that wants to help others.

So I feel like I'm providing high quality products to others who have dietary restrictions or allergies. like I do. And like my mom did because I used to bake sugar-free and low-carb for her because of her diabetes.

David Crabill: [00:05:59] Right. So this is a key part of your story where you have, done this for yourself for a long time, and now you're starting to do it for others. So can you talk a little bit about what you make with your business?

Noel Martinez: [00:06:12] Yeah. as you mentioned, I do, make Cuban inspired, vegan, gluten free, and allergy friendly, um, shelf, stable baked goods that are made with organic ingredients and a lot of love. I think I put into them a lot of time to, test those recipes and make sure I'm putting out a good product. and not everything I make is Cuban inspired.

For example, I have vanilla cupcakes or red velvet cupcakes, but I do try out of each of my type of baked goods. I try to, more and more include something that has Cuban flavors, whether it be guava or, a tropical fruit or, Cuban coffee and my, uh, Cuban. Mini bundt cakes.

so just, some different items to bring in those flavors that, I remember, and that I love from my childhood and growing up.

David Crabill: [00:07:08] do you feel like having the Cuban specific and cultural basis for your baked goods? gives you a bit more marketing potential when you're, kind of specializing in something that is novel or new to people.

Noel Martinez: [00:07:25] I mean, at first when I started, um, doing all kinds of research and testing recipes over and over, there were some that I tested 10, 10 to 20 times, just to get them right. And that comes with the fact that they're vegan and gluten-free, you know, that throwing those two wrenches into the mix, you know, sometimes, really.

Can change the chemistry of a recipe, um, and baking. But, to answer your question specifically at first, when I was putting some of these things out there with samples, you know, I was afraid that people would be afraid to try something new, but it's just the opposite. I mean, there are customers that are pretty plain Jane, if you will. And they tell me straight up, I like just plain stuff. I want a chocolate chip cookie. I want a vanilla cake or cupcake, but then I'd say the majority of my, customers see something new and different and they want to try it.

They're excited about trying something different. So that definitely gives me an edge. but I think that more than anything, the healthier aspect of my baked goods. Is what really drives it home. and that was actually very surprising to me, because when people hear healthy and when they know, Oh, Hey, it's better for you and such and such, or they hear the word vegan or any kind of free of this or free of that.

You know, I thought that would kind of push people away, but actually. Most of my customers. Don't have any allergies don't have any dietary restrictions. There's actually a small handful of customers that do. but the majority of my customers just see, not only where I get my inspiration from, but also the fact that what the product I'm putting out and what they're eating is not only good and delicious, but they're also enjoying.

Truly the fact that they know it's better for them and it's, not full of chemicals and preservatives and everything else that you can get, much cheaper but less healthy at the store.

David Crabill: [00:09:45] can you talk a little bit about the challenges of making your desserts healthy? I know you Do gluten-free you do vegan. If somebody was interested in. Wanting to add that to their product line or start a diet specific business like you have, what are some of the challenges? What should they be thinking about when they are working on those recipes in the kitchen?

Noel Martinez: [00:10:07] well, I can't stress enough, like to test your recipes well in advance. And I learned this the hard way with some things, but, Sometimes learning lesson while you're selling or while you're figuring things out, that's part of what makes you better at it. but yeah, number one, give yourself ample time to really test.

Your recipes until you get it just the way, you know, you want it. Um, as far as gluten-free I think, and vegan, I mean, really even sugar-free I think the biggest things you want to get right. Are texture. That's like probably top. Top of the line there, because nothing makes me happier than, than one of two things.

Either hearing somebody say, wow, I couldn't tell the difference between that and a regular, you know, cupcake, the other thing that makes me happy is to hear, when somebody is so happy that they. We're able to have that brownie and know that they were not going to get sick from it.

So, yeah, definitely. texture is number one. I would say taste of course is also important. have other people try it, want somebody who's a true critic, because you have to be open to criticism So I think those are some key things that are important for sure.

David Crabill: [00:11:39] So, what do you mean when you say you learn things the hard way? Do you have any examples of that?

Noel Martinez: [00:11:44] Sure. So I know there's been a few recipes that I have tested many times. And, for the most part, they came out, they came out fine, but let's say, you know, I made one simple change that you don't, I think is going to affect the recipe, but you'd be surprised sometimes for example, adding a little more vanilla extract, which is a liquid or adding a little more sugar, or maybe a measurement was just slightly off.

And then, you know, I'm making products to sell that day or the next day. I'm not going to have time to, you know, make any, any more, if things go wrong. But, you know, there've been times that I've had to put those products out and even though I tried them and I felt like they were okay, but there weren't quite the way they were the last time I made them, I still put them out and, Happily. And luckily they loved them, you know, but that doesn't mean that I stopped working on that recipe. Something I've learned is to take notes when you are testing recipes. at first, you know, sometimes you're in a time crunch or for whatever reason and you didn't write down, well, what temperature did I bake it at on this date? You know, you need to take very specific notes about every little change. You make everything you do. Every time that you try a recipe or you make a change or you bake it a different way, use a different pan, whatever it might be.

David Crabill: [00:13:17] It's funny to hear you say that everyone loved the products that you consider to be failures. And I think that's pretty often the case where we're our own biggest critics when we are making things, you know, You can tell the difference, but no one else really can.

Noel Martinez: [00:13:33] You're right. You know what, that's something that I've learned, but I think it makes sense that we kind of have to be don't you agree? Cause I, I know you

make fudge and you know, I'm sure you've gone through all of this yourself, like my motto is I'm not going to put something out there that. I can't say that I love,

David Crabill: [00:13:52] oh, yeah, I agree. And I think it's partly your own pride in your work and you also know what you're putting out there and that maybe most people don't notice the difference, but over time, I think that if you have a product that is truly above grade, then that is just going to help move you forward. uh, at the same time though, I do try to make sure that. I don't get so caught up trying to make my recipes perfect that I don't even get out, to sell them. You know, at some point you have to say, okay, it's good enough. And I need to move forward with this.

Noel Martinez: [00:14:30] Absolutely. I mean, that's something that I learned from you, um, from reading that very information. On your website. Um, I read quite a bit of articles on Forrager before I even, uh, started, all of this. you know, I agree that customers, you know, of course they have to like your product. Of course, they have to love those cupcakes, you know, and they have to taste good and they have to have a good texture and they have to look good.

because we eat with our eyes after all right. But, it's so important, like you say, To put yourself out there, meet the people, let them hear your story because I've, you know, heard over and over from customers. And, and I've seen it with my own eyes that, you know, there's customers who eventually, I gave, I got their email for marketing purposes.

Um, Let's say six months ago or five months ago, whatever it might be. and they hadn't opened an email until just recently, it takes time for someone to get to the point, like you say, on the website to trust you.

David Crabill: [00:15:43] Yes. You know, I definitely had the same experience with people being on my email list for months, and then they finally buy and it's like, wow, I didn't really expect you to buy. You've been on my email list for so much time and not everyone will right, but some people will. I've have been impressed by how you've.

Leveraged email marketing, and I know you've tried it. Um, can you talk a little, a bit about what you've learned by trying to incorporate email into your business and do you think it's helped? And if you do think it's helped, how much do you think it's helped?

Noel Martinez: [00:16:18] Um, so what I've learned, I think the biggest thing I've learned, I've learned that people don't check their email very much. At least my customers. However, you start somewhere, right? So I think for me, the email part of it has definitely helped, I think if I'm going to talk percentage wise, maybe, let's say 40%. Is how much the email, marketing has helped maybe even 50% at times. I think honestly for me, and it could have to do with the type of customers I have, my customers seem to respond more to the more personal or interpersonal, either face to face. Like here's what I have this week. Do you want anything? Or they might respond even some respond better to a text message. But I have to say that even though a lot of them don't open the emails or don't order through the email, menus that I send, it started there.

Right. So, that got me a base number of customers. And then from there I kept building. And then, little by little as they get to trust me and trust in my products and trust in what I'm doing in my business. Then they start to check on the emails and they start to maybe order something from the emails. And it might not be every time, but I still have to do like face to face marketing and face to face sales. Um, in the last few weeks, I'd say my face to face is maybe. 50% or 60% to 40%, somewhere around there of my actual sales.

David Crabill: [00:18:20] Let's just start with the basic numbers. You, how many people do you have on your email list and how many people are opening your emails percentage wise, and how often are you emailing?

Noel Martinez: [00:18:37] Sure. So, I generally email, once a week because I put out a weekly menu for, sales by the piece. now I also do, larger sales from my website, which I get from time to time. now, as far as numbers and percentage, my subscribers if you give me a moment here.

I have a total of about 125 emails right now. And I would say that I average somewhere between 20 and 40%, I'd say 20 and mid thirties percentages, for the openings of the emails. you know, and that fluctuates, that depends every week is different. And it depends on of course, who I'm sending to what, what time I'm sending it, et cetera. But.

David Crabill: [00:19:34] what's funny is you say, you know, 20 to 40% open rates and you think that means that very few people open their emails, but actually when you look at industry numbers, those rates are actually really good. Those are pretty high numbers for you. And it's, it might be because you have a smaller list and you have a more engaged audience.

And the other thing too is even if somebody doesn't open an email, they might still see it in their inbox and just not click on it. And just seeing that email still keeps you top of mind. So there are also benefits to sending an email, even if you're not seeing the person open it.

Noel Martinez: [00:20:11] Okay. Yeah. That's, that's great to hear. Um, I think maybe I was talking also, and maybe even a little more about like, even for the people that do open them. They're not necessarily ordering until I face to face say, Hey as a reminder, this is what I have. I sent the email out, but this is what I have this week. And that's when they're engaged a little more. So, but I do have people that will see the email and right away, as soon as they open that email, I'm getting a text message from them saying, Hey, I want two brownies this week. Put me down for two brownies, here's the day I want them or whatever. So,

David Crabill: [00:20:54] Yeah, and that's a really key cause you're, you're developing these raving fans that are following you and it's not going to be a large percentage, but a small percentage will really. Start to follow everything that you do. And then as you grow your list, as you grow your business, the more raving fans you develop, the more they will market for you in a sense, and tell everyone about what you're doing. And so you're just really, you have the foundation for growth there. And so I've been, I've been really impressed with how you've built that, that list and are continuing to build it.

Noel Martinez: [00:21:30] Absolutely. You know, it's funny you say that because I, I have seen that more and more. I'd say within the past month, Maybe two months at most, I have people coming up to me and, and I mean, mind you, we have hundreds of employees on about five different shifts per day, Monday through Sunday, seven days a week, at our building, it's a huge warehouse and, I'm impressed and, and like, delighted I have to say, when I hear someone come up to me and say, Hey, you're the bakery guy aren't you? You're that baking guy I heard about you. People are talking, somebody told me, or people are saying, or talking about you and saying how good your stuff is. And that's when you know, I give them a card and, tell them, to send me their email and, I mean, There's some people that will say, Oh, let me give it to you right now.

But like I had said before, others take more time, to kind of get on the bandwagon if you will, so I might hand them a card and I might not hear from them for a month or two, but somewhere along the line, they eventually, it takes a few different, tries, a few different times for them to say, Hey. Let me give it a try. And then, you know, you've got a lot of people that don't, and that's fine too. I mean, but I've learned to focus on not to focus so much, like you said, on the people that don't open the emails and that, don't show an interest, but focus on the customers that, and the subscribers that really, are fans, as you said, and that they really enjoy my products.

I mean, I have. Several customers who are buying weekly, like, I mean, without fail. and so I'm so appreciative of them and I try to make sure they're happy and, and really give them and everyone good customer service because everyone wants to feel special. And I think if they love your baked goods, if they love your product, that's a win, but if they know that they can count on you and if they know that, you know, you care about them as more than just, Hey, this person's filling my pocket, then I think that makes a world of difference. And that's, you know why I'm doing this? I mean, it's not just for money, so.

David Crabill: [00:23:59] Yeah. And so you started with. I knew you did email marketing from the beginning, but of course you talked about the personal interactions you've had and there's nothing that's going to be more effective than personal face-to-face communication and interaction. So I know you've been selling to a lot of coworkers.

So can you just share, like how much of your focus and your initial customer base came out of your coworkers and did you market yourself anywhere else?

Noel Martinez: [00:24:29] Um, I have to say that it all started at work because I felt where better to give out, you know, people love free food, right? They love a free. Sample of something. And so I'd seen people sharing food before. I didn't think it was an issue.

So, I had brought in some samples, just started giving to people that I knew. and I got a lot of positive feedback and, and, you know, I also asked for any constructive criticism because that would help me improve my recipes. And so from there, I would gather emails as I was giving out samples.

But I was also trying to reach people that I didn't know personally there, because I wanted to hear what everybody thought, to make sure that this could truly go somewhere. And so, I

would say, it started there and then eventually once I did my website, through square, I let some friends know, my partner also who has been instrumental in helping me through all of this. also let, his coworkers know. And so, you know, It kind of snowballed from there. And so I have made several sales on the website as well, and I think those people might tell other people, so I think the next step for me is going to be, kind of finding the time to. Start marketing more to the community. So I haven't gone that route as much yet. I'll have to be honest that, my coworkers at my current job, those customers are keeping me pretty busy every week. I'm basically selling out. Every single week. And if I don't completely sell out, I come pretty close.

David Crabill: [00:26:29] Well another interesting thing is that you started this during the pandemic. So it's not like it was. As easy to do some of those marketing techniques where you're getting out into markets and into the community and into in person interactions during this particular time.

Noel Martinez: [00:26:48] Definitely. Yeah. I mean, when I first started like putting out samples, we weren't quite there yet. But then once I did kind of start selling, once that was, you know, starting to, or almost about to come out, so it, I definitely couldn't have done too much. I mean, it wasn't summer yet, but I couldn't have done too many events or any of that, as things were closing and that wasn't really a route I could go.

David Crabill: [00:27:17] Yeah. So congratulations on selling out with your current customer base. Can you give me an idea of how many baked goods you're making per week?

Noel Martinez: [00:27:28] so let's take like, actually this last, this, just this past week, I put out about. 12 half dozen cookie packs. Um, I put out a dozen Buckeye brownies. two dozen mini coffee cakes. And then I also sold, one dozen chocolate chip cookie pack. so yeah, I'd say about five or six dozen, assorted baked goods this past week.

David Crabill: [00:28:05] And when you say put out, are you putting these out on a table or you just mean putting them out through your email and website and then people order them and you deliver,

Noel Martinez: [00:28:14] No. I mean, I've actually sold them. so by put out. I mean, I sold them, so, the way I, the way I do it. Yeah. So the way I do it is whether it's email, text message or face to face. I take basically pre-orders, of, I plan out what I'm making for that week. I send out the email menu, via text or in-person and, then I take the orders and then I, basically say these are available on these days.

So I give myself a few days at the beginning of the week to do my baking my prep, and then towards the end of the week, depending on the item, for example, donuts, I try to do those same day only because that's when they're best quality, because they're fresh. a lot of my other products can last anywhere from two to five days.

they're pretty shelf stable. And so, I will take the orders and then. I'll find out which of the, days at the end of the week they want them delivered Wednesday, Thursday or Friday, let's say is what I did this past week. And so then each of those days, I give myself time after baking or after whatever I'm working on.

before my afternoon job. so I have my morning hours up to like two o'clock, to get baking, et cetera, done, and packaging my orders. And so I package those, for my customers and then I take them to work and I basically, make the transactions, you know, during my break, before, the shift or at the end of the shift.

David Crabill: [00:29:54] And how much are you pricing these baked goods out at? Like how much are you making for five to six dozen baked goods?

Noel Martinez: [00:30:03] well, for this past week, I, I think this is probably the first time. Cause I think this was the most I've, sold in a week. quantity wise. But I believe it was over \$300. so that's gross sales, not, not net profits.

David Crabill: [00:30:24] Yeah, but so five to six dozen baked goods, you're talking about an average price per baked good of over \$5. Right?

Noel Martinez: [00:30:36] Yeah, just depending on my. depending on the product, like my Buckeye brownies are \$4 a piece, you know, obviously if they buy, a half dozen or they buy a dozen of something, I give them a break in price. There's special price for each of those. But honestly the majority of my customers purchase, at my job, they purchase per piece.

and they know that, making things. with quality ingredients, et cetera. I mean, it does cost me more to make these products and my time. but I also have to make a profit and a lot of them understand that. It's a funny, I'll give you a funny story. When I first started selling, my, Jumbo cookies.

I originally was going to sell those for about \$2 per jumbo cookie. One of my customers who was actually, placing an order, for a few of those said to me, you need to charge more for those, she said, Your stuff is really good. Cause she'd already made some purchases. It really was, like you said, one of, definitely one of my fans and, she said you need to definitely charge more for those.

So I did, I did, you know, decide. That I was going to increase that price a little bit. And so that ended up at \$3, which was, still moderate. But I think, you make some decisions on your pricing depending on what it is. And some items cost a little more. I think you make up what you might lose on, on some items you make up on others.

but like for example, this past week, my, half dozen cookie packs, which are, you know, what I was selling the assorted ones, you know, you have to make different types of cookies. That takes time also, my fluffy sugar cookies also known as, Quote, unquote loft house. If anybody knows those, they, with the frosting homemade frosting on top, I mean, they're time consuming as well.

So I actually sell those for \$12, for a half dozen cookies. And, to my surprise, I mean, I'll be honest. I would pay that for the quality and how good these cookies are. I can't resist them myself. but I was surprised that people were with no question with no, second thought, you know, willing to pay that much for the, for the cookies.

not that I don't think they're worth it. But, because they're a specialty item, they are a higher price and, people are enjoying them and that's, what's most important.

David Crabill: [00:33:28] Yeah know it. I mean, I'm just thinking about Lofthouse cookies here. I've I think that's, one of Tara's favorite cookies and I feel like. They're about \$4 for 10 of them, obviously, not even close to the quality of your cookies, but if that's the pricing that people have in their heads and then \$2 each is going to be a very high price for people.

But it's interesting to hear that people haven't balked or blinked at that pricing whatsoever. And it probably just speaks to how you've educated them and shared your story about what you're doing.

Noel Martinez: [00:34:04] Absolutely. I mean, just the other day somebody said, Oh, I went on your website and read your story. And I've gotten a lot of people, a lot of customers, even people that haven't bought anything, they just say to me, I just. Love, what you're doing and I want to support you because I love you know, how you're putting out vegan products and healthier stuff.

you really care about what, what you are making and selling. And I think that's, that's a big part of it, that you care about. What you are putting out there, what people are putting into their bodies. And that's what I tell people, because it's the truth. I don't want to put out a product that is, hurtful to anyone.

I want to put out a product that tastes delicious and yeah, of course it's sugar. It's a baked good. You don't want to go crazy and go overboard regardless, but everybody loves a baked. Good. Right. Well, if you're going to eat it, you it's better to eat something that's better for you. it's good for your body and your soul. Like I say, on my website,

David Crabill: [00:35:13] Do most customers just kind of take your word for it. When you say it's healthy or do they, are they skeptical? Do they ask, like, what do you say to someone who's like, how, how are these healthy, you know, how are these good for me? Do you have like a little pitch that you, you tell them in order to educate them?

Noel Martinez: [00:35:35] I mean, I'm just honest. I mean, depending I definitely do get questions, um, here and there, you know, I think a lot of people trust me, you know, they trust what I'm putting out there. but I do have people, I do have a few vegan customers. I do have, one or two gluten-free customers. I have a few customers that have to eat sugar-free or I even have a couple that are, you know, on keto diets. So, When I get a question, I answer as honestly as I can, I've gotten questions about, Hey, what kind of product, do you use like, is it a product that, takes care of our resources?

Um, Is this organic, is that organic? I mean, I'm honest, I can't realistically use all organic ingredients because not everything is easily accessible, not, everything is cost effective. I'd say to, to get every single item organic, but, I would say, you know, 70 to 90% of my ingredients are organic, um, are, better quality.

and I get questions About the specific ingredients. Well, if you don't use butter, cause obviously a vegan product has no animal products. So that means no butter. So they do, they ask me those questions and I'll answer as honestly as I can.

I mean, you know, about what I'm using, what kind of alternates I use. I mean, I think if someone loves your product, you know, I'm not the type of. Person, that's afraid that they're going to go out and try to steal my, I mean, steal my recipe. I'm not giving out my recipes per se, but I don't have a problem telling them, Hey, I use flax eggs in my products or I might use aquafaba, which is, you know, uh, like a bean, Bean juice or the liquid from canned beans, you know, let's say, you know, there's different alternatives that I can use, vegan butters that are out there.

I mean, there's no like big secrets, you know, it's just about how I put these ingredients together and, and what I do to make it as, as good of a product as I can.

David Crabill: [00:37:57] Yeah. And some of these alternate ingredients are still pretty highly specialized and not that easy to find. How are you sourcing your ingredients?

Noel Martinez: [00:38:06] Oh, wow. All over the place. That's my answer. I mean, I get, I get a good bit of stuff I can get from Amazon. thankfully, that comes right to my house, but for other things like the vegan butter that I use, I have to go out to a whole foods store.

Um, and I have to call around first to make sure they have it in stock. some of the items I use, like you said, they're specialized and they are harder to find. So I have to kind of go. Different places, you know, different sources to find what I need.

David Crabill: [00:38:45] so you said that you're doing. \$4 for a brownie, which is pretty high in my opinion. And, uh, then you're doing \$3 for a cookie and \$12 for a half dozen cookies. But what are some of the other prices? I know you have your coffee cake. I remember the coffee cake, just being an extraordinarily high price for a coffee cake, but you said people were buying them like crazy.

Noel Martinez: [00:39:13] Yeah. So the mini coffee cakes, which are a single serving, those are \$5 a piece I do have a, a full size. Eight by eight inch coffee cake. And that is, In the \$40 range. uh, it depends on, on the type of coffee cake. It is. I have a plain coffee cake. I have a blueberry coffee cake, and then I have a Cuban inspired coffee cake, which is the, It has, uh, chunks of guava paste inside throughout the cake itself. It has. Your usual Crump topping, but I add sliced almonds. And then I do a homemade, coconut milk, caramel sauce to make it vegan and delicious because coconut is delicious. And so I drizzle that all over the top of the coffee cake and that's like definitely a big seller and, uh, You know, surprisingly people are fine with my prices. and when I've done, cause I did do some research and I looked at other places,

I mean, I I'll be honest that I've seen prices for regular bakeries that are not. Any special diet, not vegan, not gluten free. They're just regular wheat based. let's say a coffee cake or I've looked at a cupcake, a muffin. My prices aren't that far off from. Some of those bakeries for regular ones.

And then I look at more specialized bakeries and I see some of those bakeries where I'm right around the same price, or they're actually a little higher than I am. And that depends on the, on the items. So I think it was important to look around and see what other people are charging. But I also had to kind of. Set my own prices and say, Hey, I know what, how much work goes into this. And I know what my ingredients cost and I, I think I have to value my time and value, my product as well.

David Crabill: [00:41:26] I was wondering, you know, you're making about five to six dozen baked goods a week, and I know some of those are larger baked goods so it could be quite a bit. But do you feel like you have extra bandwidth? In your kitchen or in your life to produce more than that and expand your business, or do you feel like you're maxed out with your current job situation and life situation?

Noel Martinez: [00:41:52] So great question. Um, because it's something I've been thinking about, and obviously I'm going to have to either sell more quantity, or get more customers. Right. And, So I would say that for the size of my kitchen, which is rather small, to be honest, it would be pushing it to produce more. However, if I split it up, to different days, like I have been doing, I think it's possible, but what I have been thinking about. in the past month or so is, whether I, can maybe cut one day out of my other job.

In order to have a full baking day for the business, baking slash administrative work, whatever marketing, so that I can focus a little more on the business. I think right now, depending on what I'm making each week, sometimes I'm a little strapped. For time, depending when I can start.

Cause obviously, I start my afternoon, my other job, I start at, 2:30, so I don't finish until 7:30. And by the time I get home and get settled, you know, it's nine o'clock So, I don't want it to get to the point where I'm. Pushing myself too much. So I have decided to take a look at the end of this month, take a look at the past quarter, the past three months and see what my sales really have been after I subtract, you know, all of my costs, to see, Hey, is it feasible for me to cut out a shift, which would be a full day of, um, my other part-time job. And if it is, and I'm able to, I'm pretty serious about doing that so that I can focus more on the business and build that customer base in the community. So I can really work on. Increasing customer base and increasing sales.

David Crabill: [00:44:07] Yeah. And you definitely, you have a customer base, you know, that there's demand there. So you have a really good jumping off point for you to grow from.

Noel Martinez: [00:44:17] Yeah, I think so. So I think it's, more work to be done, but I think I can go a little further.

David Crabill: [00:44:25] So if you think back to before you started it, when you were thinking about jumping in and getting your feet wet, And if you can think about what you envisioned your business would be, and now think about what it looks like today. Does it look pretty much like what you envisioned it or did it take you a different place than you thought it would.

Noel Martinez: [00:44:48] honestly, I think it's a little bigger than what I thought it would be. I never imagined, like I thought I would do some sales and. Yeah. You know, people that I know would become customers. I, I never, I originally thought more of sales through my website. I kind of made decisions along the way that made more sense to sell at work.

it's kind of a convenience for my coworkers because I bring their baked goods right. To work during their shift, which a lot of them love because they'll, they'll eat it for their break, snack during break, or their lunch break or whatever. But, yeah, I honestly didn't think I'd be doing as much as I'm doing.

David Crabill: [00:45:35] so is there anything that you would recommend to someone who's starting today or thinking about starting a cottage food business, anything that you've learned along the way?

Noel Martinez: [00:45:48] I think it's important to, to be honest and to be yourself, I think that's really important. I think it's really, Oh, here's a good one. I think it's really important. Cause I had to take a step back when I was first going to start and first, ready to put, put my website together and put products on there.

I mean, I wanted to put. More on there than I should have. And so I had to cut that back. It's important to not start with too much, so it's better. And this is something you say, uh, you suggested to me as well, and that you say on your website, it's better to sell one, two, three products. It just depends on the person. It depends on what they're selling. But better to start small because you can always add, you don't want to overdo it and then not be able to keep up. So

David Crabill: [00:46:50] And how did you decide what to, focus on?

Noel Martinez: [00:46:54] well, I, I, I originally had, multiple types of different, basic baked goods, but. I realized like that might just be too much. So I kind of scaled it back to maybe one basic type or for certain items, two basic types of, baked goods. So for example, I decided, okay, I'm gonna cut it off at just four different baked goods per week maximum. And then, you know, if I, if I want to do like a simple alternate of one of those, like if I'm doing brownies that week, well, then I could do like, Plain brownies and then the Buckeye brownies with the peanut butter balls inside. I mean, that type of thing. So I think that makes a lot more sense.

David Crabill: [00:47:50] You mentioned that you do about four different items per week, and you also mentioned that most of your customers really like new, different things. So do you feel like just having that kind of customer base, it means that you need to constantly be adding new things to your menu for them to try.

Noel Martinez: [00:48:09] not necessarily because you have customers that I have customers. That absolutely love the Buckeye brownies. They're asking me about them all the time and they have told me this, face to face, I would buy your Buckeye brownies every single week. You should make them every week because I'll buy them every single week, but you have other customers that want to try different things.

So what I try to do is try to meet those needs, but keep it manageable for myself. And the way I do that is let's say I'm making bundt cakes the one week. Well, it's easy enough for me to do, Let's say blueberries in some of the bundt cakes, and then have plain bundt cakes for the people that like more plain flavors, sometimes something as simple as a filling or something as simple as a topping could totally change, product and, and customer satisfaction and interest. another good example is, my donuts, I mean, my donuts are, are great. They're a cake donut. They're relatively easy to make. So what I can do, or what I did is I had been doing donuts for a few months and I tried a few different toppings, but I was ready to try something different. Well, I had made. peanut butter and jelly cupcakes that had a homemade strawberry jam filling, which those went over pretty well. they're kind of a specialized item, so I don't think everybody would love it, but all the customers that bought it did love it.

So what I did was I took the strawberry jam that I had left over because as a Baker, as a person in the food industry, you know, that you have to try to use up your ingredients. so that you don't waste anything. So the following week I took that homemade strawberry jam and I decided I'm going to make some strawberry swirl donuts, which I had a recipe for. And so I, I had to change the recipe around a little bit, but I worked on it and I got them where I wanted them, eventually. And so. I used up that strawberry jam and those donuts became a thing. So then the next week or two weeks after that, I picked up some fresh peaches from the farmer's market when they finally opened. And I said, I have extra peaches. I'm gonna make a strawberry or a peach jam. So I made a peach jam and then I converted that. Into peach swirl donuts, and those went over great. people loved those. so I mean, I think that's kind of the way to go about it and still be able to manage, what your different options are.

David Crabill: [00:51:09] Yeah, it's very cool to hear you kind of adapting your recipes and then things that you didn't even have on the menu initially became some of your best sellers. Well, Noel, we've been talking for a while and it's cool to hear how your business has progressed. How could people reach out to you?

Noel Martinez: [00:51:26] Well, um, it's they want to check out the website it's mamisbakes.com. They can also email mamisbakes@gmail.com or they can call or text, uh, (412) 585-5108.

David Crabill: [00:51:53] Awesome. Well, I wish you all the best as you keep growing this business. And thanks so much for getting on the show today and sharing with us.

Noel Martinez: [00:52:02] Thank you so much.

David Crabill: [00:52:03] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. I really enjoyed hearing what Noel is currently thinking about as he manages the early stages of growing his business and trying to keep up with demand for his specialty baked goods.

If you are thinking about starting a cottage food business of your own head on over to forrager.com to [check out your state's cottage food law](#).

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/20. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.