

# Family, Freedom, & Pie with Kourtney Rojas

**David Crabill:** Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs, about their strategies for running a food business from home I'm David Crabill. And today I'm talking with Kourtney Rojas. Kourtney lives in Anaheim, California, and sells pies with her cottage food business. With love from scratch.

Kourtney started selling her pies back in 2011, but she really started to get more serious about growing her business in 2019. In this episode, you're going to hear how she's grown it very organically and slowly over time and has taken advantage of the flexibility and freedom that a cottage food business can offer.

family certainly comes first for Kourtney and as her pies have become increasingly popular, she has learned how to say no and how to find the right balance between her family and her business. And I think you'll appreciate her honesty that it hasn't always been easy, but it has definitely been rewarding. And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

welcome to the show, Kourtney. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:01] **Kourtney Rojas:** Thank you. It's nice to be here.

[00:01:03] **David Crabill:** So Kourtney, can you take us back to, I think 2011, it was when you started this thing you know, how did you get into this pie making business?

[00:01:13] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah. So I actually started baking pies in 2011. I was actually working at a restaurant and I was working in the back of the house. you know, I would do cold appetizers salads. I would plate desserts. and one of my good friends at the time, she was planning her wedding for September and it was a ranch style, rustic themed wedding. And she wanted to have pies instead of cake. So we were having lunch one day and she just innocently asked me if I had any recommendations for wedding type pies.

So I told her that I would do some research, look around and see if I found any pie shops that could help her out. I didn't have any knee-jerk reaction to do

them, myself. I just told her I would look around. So I did some Google searches and uh, I came up with Marie calendars, Polly's pies Coco's and you know, not that there's anything wrong with those pie shops.

That's what I grew up on. I just didn't see the custom decor, and themed like pies she was looking for. So I got back in touch with her and I just had the random idea to bake them myself. So I told her that I would volunteer and it would be a wedding gift to her, for me, for me to bake the pies for her.

So that's kind of how my pie baking started. I honestly don't think I had baked a pie before that wedding.

[00:02:45] **David Crabill:** Wow.

[00:02:46] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah.

[00:02:47] **David Crabill:** So you, you went from just doing a wedding gift to running a whole business from this one event.

[00:02:55] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah, So this is 2011 and I was single. I didn't have a husband or kids to worry about. You know, we did a tasting, I baked her mini pies. all hands were on deck. My mom was helping me roll out pie dough.

My sister-in-law was helping me. We were using my brother's mini fridge upstairs to kind of store the pies before the wedding. It was pretty chaotic and I didn't even. I didn't even have like my recipes yet. I just did some research. I went to the library, I checked out the uh, I think it's the pie and pastry Bible.

You know, I experimented with different kinds of crusts, I never hesitated to do everything by scratch, but at the time I really just didn't know what I was doing. I just said I would do it.

So that's kind of how it all started in 2011,

[00:03:43] **David Crabill:** Yeah, a wedding is pretty like, you don't want to mess up somebody's wedding day. Right. So if you never baked a pie before, what gave you the confidence to know that you could actually do this for her wedding

[00:03:58] **Kourtney Rojas:** honestly, looking back now. I probably would be more nervous today or am more nervous today when I bake for weddings. than I was then, I don't know. I think it was just the fact that she was a good friend of mine and she was very casual about it. So I just figured, all right, like let's just do this. luckily I didn't think too much.

I didn't overthink it. And then while I was doing it, I think that's when I realized how much I love baking pies. Cause I had been a baker, a self-taught baker from about 2007, until 2011. I worked at a bakery in college and when I graduated with an English degree, I was in Boston at the time and I was working for flour bakery, which is run by Joanne Chang and everything in that bakery is made from scratch.

They do savory, they do sweet, they do beverages. You know, they roast their own meats, like everything was from scratch. So I had that in my head already that I wanted to be a baker, but not necessarily a pie baker. So when she brought that to me, I knew I could bake. I just had never tried my hand at pies before.

[00:05:04] **David Crabill:** I saw on your website that you said that you are passionate about pies and yet you had never made a pie, you know, 10 years ago was your first pie. When did you feel like you started to get passionate about making pies?

[00:05:24] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah. So, 10 years ago was when it started. Pie has been a big part of my life. And it's funny, cause I've read books from different, you know, cookbooks from different pie bakers and I've listened to different podcasts of bakers. And a lot of people have these stories of, you know, grandma and I were baking pies in her kitchen and she gave me her recipe and I don't have that story.

My mom and my grandmother, they're both very busy people. I have four brothers, so there was no scratch baking going on in my house. But every time we had a gathering, My dad would take me to Marie calendars and we'd go pick out a couple pies. So pie has always been special to me, I guess.

And I didn't really realize it until I started baking them myself, how, like what they meant to me, the significance of them people coming together and just the simplicity of pie. It's, you know, all butter crust pastry with a seasonal fruit. That's kind of what drew me to them.

[00:06:27] **David Crabill:** So, when did you start to feel like, okay, this might be a business opportunity.

[00:06:35] **Kourtney Rojas:** So the business opportunity actually didn't come until about 2019. So there's eight years in between my first event. If you want to call it till what I actually got serious about the business. And I hesitate to say serious because I never really set out like, okay, this is what I'm going to do.

And in two years I'm going to be doing this. And in four years, you know, it was just kind of like really organic. Like, let's see what happens in 2011 when I baked those first pies. Yes, I romanticized it and I thought, oh, like, let me see how I get some kind of a permit. How I start selling at the local farmer's market.

I got passionate about it. That was in September. I sold some pies for the fall to friends and family, nothing crazy, you know, maybe four or five pies. And then I'd go back to my job and, you know, work at the restaurant, go back to life. you know, I met someone, I got married. I had have two children.

That are four, almost four, he'll be four tomorrow and seven. So the business didn't take off until 2019. When over those eight years, friends and family would ask me for pies. I did a couple of weddings but I didn't run with it right away.

It really did unfold very organically until the point where it is now, which still some days I don't really believe that I own a business. It's weird. It's weird to say it's weird to digest, I guess.

[00:08:04] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I did notice that you started your facebook page back in 2011. So clearly you had ideas about something business related when you started that. Um, And you said you, you know, kind of romanticized the idea. did this pie thing that you got excited about? Did it disappoint you.

[00:08:25] **Kourtney Rojas:** No, it didn't disappoint me. I think I was young, younger, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do. So what I would do is I would just go along with life, wherever life pulled me, I, I worked for a nursing home where I would do desserts for them and I would bake pies for them. After I had my first child, it was, I should be working in an office because I need those eight to five. I need the check, you.

know, I need the stability and then I'd find myself baking again in the summer. I bake for holidays. It definitely didn't disappoint me. Think deep down, I knew one day I would come back to it, it's just, I didn't really know. I didn't have a straight line in my head. I didn't really know where to go,

[00:09:11] **David Crabill:** well, Hey, you know, business is never a straight line. That's definitely true. Well, you've now run a pretty successful business. You make tons of pies now. So you know what that's like, knowing what you know now, do you wish that you had invested more into it back then?

[00:09:30] **Kourtney Rojas:** Absolutely not No. I'm very happy. I'm very, very happy today. And I just look back at my journey as being so organic. And I don't know, maybe I'm still a little romantic, but I just feel like it's, it was meant to be, and it happened exactly when it was supposed to happen.

[00:09:49] **David Crabill:** All right. So it sounds like you did some sporadic events over those seven, eight years or so made some for family and friends, but things didn't start kicking off until what, 2018, 2019. So take me through that. What, when did things start to pick up? Why did they start to pick up what happened?

[00:10:09] **Kourtney Rojas:** Okay. So what happened was in 2018, that fall my son had just turned one and of course my family and friends were always raving about how good my pies were, but I didn't know, you know, are they saying it because they're my family and friends and they're being nice.

So I had actually visited the orange county fair and I went through the exhibits and I saw the baked goods, exhibits and contests. And I didn't know that was a thing. So I got on the computer and I found out that the LA county fair, which runs a little later in the season was actually accepting applications for their baking contest and they have a pie category. So I impulsively enter the contest and I'm, you know, I'm super excited. This is how I'm going to see if you know, my pies are really good because they're actually going to be judged by people that are not my family and friends, and maybe don't want to hurt my feelings. So I enter the contest. Uh, My whole family comes with me and we go to the fair. I think I brought, I brought a blueberry pie and I brought a lemon raspberry pie and I brought a chocolate cream pie and of the three, two of them placed with a second place. So that kind of gave me the confidence that I needed. Like, all right. Maybe I actually do, you know how to make a good pies. So that was the fall of 2018, you know, life continued to happen.

And then in 2019, I, what really happened was I joined Instagram as a business page and I had a friend of mine come over and she took styled professional pictures of my pies. And I started to get active on Instagram. And really from there, things just took off.

[00:11:59] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I noticed that your photography's really good, so that's not being done by you. That's being done by a friend.

[00:12:06] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah. So a lot of the pictures are by me. And then I would ask her to edit them for me because there's only so many pictures that we can get in one shoot. And I can't have her coming back here every week or every, not even every month. I think she comes maybe once a twice a year now. So when I first started out, I was very self-conscious about what to post and what not to post and making sure everything looked aesthetically pleasing.

And my page looked professional. So I'd use her photos. I do a lot of them on my own now, just because it takes up a lot of her time to be sending her pictures and expecting her to edit them and get them back to me.

I just do the best that I can and use different apps on my phone.

[00:12:52] **David Crabill:** Okay. So it's cool to hear that your business kind of kicked off from Instagram. You know, a lot of people go to a farmer's market or something and they use a market to boost their business. But it sounds like you did things the online route. So when you started posting really quality photos on your Instagram page were you posting on like every day?

And then How did you see your Instagram page grow over time to the point where, I guess where you were getting direct messages from people asking to buy.

[00:13:26] **Kourtney Rojas:** I was pretty, I guess, eager, aggressive in the beginning, in 2000 may of 2019. I would, I would only post maybe once or twice a week. I researched about hashtags, how they help you, which ones to use. And then what I would also do is on Facebook, I would try to look around like local wedding planners have pages or groups, local mom groups, just kind of, honestly, I would search in there.

I put pie in there and see if anything came up because a lot of these moms groups, women would post like, Hey, looking for pies for this event or looking

for cookies for that event. So that got me a couple of local leads. I also would just search wedding plan like Instagram, not only just for posting, but it's a really good tool for finding things in your area, just by searching hashtags or searching different categories, things pop up that are close to you. So I would kind of do that a little bit work on there.

Try to find wedding planners in the area, different events that were going on, like popups. I would befriend a lot of pie bakers just throughout the country. I kind of look around and see, okay, what's so-and-so in North Carolina doing, oh, they're doing a local event with a brewery where they're doing like pies and pints. That's cool. Like, let me reach out to this brewery over here and see if they're interested in doing something like that.

And lo and behold, they were, so that's kind of how a lot of the business started was using Instagram in that way. Not just letting people come to me and find my page, but actively going out to find people in my community that made me want to partner up and collaborate.

[00:15:18] **David Crabill:** So, what did this translate to in 2019? Uh, When were you starting to get orders and how many orders were you getting per week?

[00:15:26] **Kourtney Rojas:** So, 2019, I was still working full time at an office job. I'd say that year I was mainly still doing friends, you know, orders for friends, A lot of coworkers, my boss at the time was very supportive.

So she would order pies from me. Um, I worked for an electrical contractor. Some of the electricians would order pies from me, but I would say no more than, I don't know, maybe two orders a week,

[00:15:55] **David Crabill:** okay. And so when did things start to really take off, I mean, or was two orders a week? You know, what you were looking for?

[00:16:04] **Kourtney Rojas:** you know, at the time it excited me. I thought I was, I thought I was getting somewhere. It was exciting and it kept me going, it kept building my confidence. It made me feel like I was working towards something at that time. But by Thanksgiving of that year, I was busier. I had a lot more orders for Thanksgiving.

My boss at work could see that I was struggling kind of, you know, I was office manager while also trying to balance this business at the same time. So by the

end of that holiday season in January of 2020, my boss and I actually sat down and we talked because she had always been a big supporter of my business and she saw how happy it made me.

So she just straight out asked me like, how much time do I have with you? You know, you're the office manager I'd been there for three years. So she just wanted to know. What's your timeline looking like, like, I know we're going to lose you. I know you're going to go full force with this. You're doing great.

So how long do I have with you? And I couldn't give her an answer. I was still afraid. Like, I don't know. I don't know if I can make it just doing pies full-time by then I'd actually started a farmer's market. So I did start my first farmer's market in the late fall of 2019. And it was a smaller market on Saturdays from nine to 1 92. So I was getting a little bit of, of revenue there. I was getting my name out there. People could find me at a location every single week, so that was helping out, but it still didn't feel like enough to just let go of the full-time job. You know, I have had two kids and a family to help support, so I wasn't, I wasn't ready yet.

[00:17:55] **David Crabill:** Okay. So things are starting to pick up, but you're not yet ready to jump ship from your job, but this is just right before the pandemic hit. Right. So how did the pandemic start to impact everything?

[00:18:09] **Kourtney Rojas:** you know, it was very difficult family wise. My kids were no longer in school. My husband wasn't working for a couple of months, but it was also a huge blessing for me because um, my boss decided that she would furlough me so I could stay home and help my daughter with school.

And that gave me the opportunity to turn towards my, my baking business and really put forth the effort into it. That would be like a full-time thing and see what happened. So. You know, March 20, 20, I am busy. I'm doing home pickups, I'm doing contactless porch. Pick-ups I'm using Instagram to do these weekly variety boxes where I'm selling, you know, six different pies and people are just coming to the house and picking them up. And, it's busy, very busy for me.

[00:19:07] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, I know that the pandemic, I mean, that's right. When people started seeking out comfort food and typically most of the home bakeries out there did really well during the pandemic. So do you think that just boosted your business like crazy?

[00:19:24] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah, I do. I think, I mean the comfort food, the time that people had to travel. Safely travel in their vehicles just to come pick up a pie where as before, maybe they wouldn't have that time to, you know, research a little bit, instead of just going to their go-to shop. They found me, they might've been scrolling on Instagram and saw someone else post my pie and they got intrigued and they were able to, to come pick up pies.

So, yeah, I was definitely when I started to talk to family and friends about possibly just not going back to work, I felt like there was a little bit of hesitation in some people's eyes like, Hmm, this is just a pandemic thing. Like just wait. And there was hesitation in my own heart too like, well, is it a pandemic thing?

Like, am I going to see numbers like this next year? Or is this all going to go away? But I didn't, you know, I don't know. I just felt. Like my business so far has been such a long journey that I just felt like it was right at this time. And then I could take the training wheels off and leave the job and make this work.

And, you know, worst case scenario, it didn't work. I could find a new job or go back to the old job.

[00:20:42] **David Crabill:** So be honest, has it been a pandemic thing?

[00:20:47] **Kourtney Rojas:** You know what, no it hasn't my numbers are still great. sometimes they are too great. you know, I'm only one person and baking pies is a lot of work. So I've learned over the years to say no during pandemic, it was, it was everyday baking. I was turning on the oven every day. It was, Hey, can I get a pie for tomorrow?

Yeah, sure. You know, there was that fear of. That people pleasing in me, like, yes, yes, yes, yes. And now a year and a half later, it's, there's a lot of no's in my life. A lot of, no, no, thank you. I'm sorry. I cannot. And that's okay. I'm still able to contribute to my family with the numbers that I, I do weekly now.

it's still just a big learning. It's just a big lesson. During the pandemic and August of 2020, I joined a different farmer's market and this farmer's market was busy. It was busy. Like I had never seen before. I brought 50 of my five inch pies to the first market. And I sold out in 30 minutes.

Whereas before, when I was doing the older farmer's market, I was selling maybe 20 pies, maybe 30 on a good day. So when I joined this other farmer's

market during the pandemic I was selling 150 pies weekly I stayed at that farmer's market still am at that farmer's market and the numbers have gone down definitely, but they're still great numbers.

So it gives me a kind of a break. Like I don't have to bring 150 pies. I could just bring a hundred and still be okay.

[00:22:27] **David Crabill:** I read an article that was written a couple of years ago about you. and you said, you know, eventually you would like to get into the farmer's market. That was a goal of yours at the time. And now you've joined the farmer's market, but I just saw a recent post, super recent post on social media where you said that you want, were going to be leaving one of the farmer's markets. Can you talk a little bit about that?

[00:22:51] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yes. So this is kind of what I was talking about. Like the flexibility, the learning, the journey, trying different things, seeing what works for me and what doesn't work for me, I always had wanted to be at a farmer's market back in 2011. That was the fantasy. I got there. I stayed there consistently for a year at one.

I joined another, so I, I do the one on Sundays and then I do it every other Thursday and I love the farmer's market. I love the community. I love that I can buy peaches from my neighbor across the way. I love that I kind of have coworkers because I see them every week and I'm not just by myself baking.

Like I normally am. I love the customers. I love seeing people week after week, but right now my kids are both in school. So I have a soon to be four year old. Who's in preschool at one school and a seven year old who's in second grade at a separate school. And. Well, it's funny, cause I'd seen on Instagram, all these parents, these baker parents who were so excited, their kids were going to school and they were going to have so much time.

Uh, That's not my reality. And I don't know if it's theirs either with dropping one off at 8:00 AM. Both of them off at 8am actually going back at 11:00 AM, going back at two 30, going to soccer practice, going to TaeKwonDo. I just, I no longer have lot of uninterrupted time to bake and going to a farmer's market every week is a lot of work.

my week ends on Sunday when the farmer's market is over and it starts Monday morning when I start prepping dough for that same farmer's market

the next week. So with the kids being back in school and their extracurricular activities vamping up. I just, I had to take something off of my plate.

So I decided to go back to opening up for some home pickups. You know, I'm going to play it by ear week to week. See what kind of time I have what kind of ingredients I can get. And then I am still doing the market on Thursdays every other week. So kind of dialing it down, seeing how life plays at this level and then seeing how the holidays go. And then we'll go from there.

[00:25:09] **David Crabill:** Well, that's one of the nice things about having your own business is that you have the freedom to be able to make the choices that you need to make depending on your life circumstance. So Do you feel like it's been a struggle because you have young kids? to run a bakery business at the same time as trying to raise young children. And how have you managed that?

[00:25:30] **Kourtney Rojas:** I, mean, it's, it's all I know. So I can't compare it to not having them here, but it definitely has its pros and cons. the good parts about it are I am at home and I am able to go run and pick them up if I need to. But the hard part is, even though I'm at home, I'm still working. You know, like, even though you can see me and you can ask me for a snack or you want me to play with you because I'm right here, I'm actually not right here because I'm trying to get these pies done for an event.

So, yeah, it's, it's been a struggle. I mean, but if I were working a nine to five, there would just be a different struggle. So it's no different than any other parents, I think. And I think in a lot of ways, it's better. My children will have these memories of me baking pies. My daughter comes with me to the farmer's market.

She brings her skateboard. She makes friends with the other vendor's kids. So I think that's a really cool memory that they'll have as children, but yeah, it's still a struggle.

[00:26:40] **David Crabill:** Well, I, I did see that you incorporate a lot of your family into this business. How are they involved?

[00:26:47] **Kourtney Rojas:** I do. I love my family. I have a big family. So my husband is a full-time bartender for the Hyatt. So he was, had a lot of extra time during the pandemic. So he was hands on deck over here. He was helping me peel apples and helping me wash fruit. He definitely helps me with the

boxing of the pies. He comes home on Saturday nights from his job, and he's kind of like the organizer, the type a, the packer. So he packs the car up. He makes sure we got everything. And then he's the extrovert. So at the farmer's market, he's the one that's actually talking about. All the details of the pies? I'm more of the introvert, so I like to see people, but I don't like to talk too much.

Um, And then his mother, my mother-in-law she's, she steps in and helps with the kids when we're at the markets. So she has been very helpful. She also comes over when I need her to, and she helps me. Same thing helps me peel fruit, slice fruit cut the butter, get it ready for the dough, pick up the kids if I need it. And then my own dad, he too will, if my husband's working or something, he likes to stop by the market and help me sell. And unfortunately my mom and dad are moving to Arizona this year. So my mom, although she claims she hates baking. She is a really good roller. So during Thanksgiving, she comes over during the week nights and she just helps me roll out the dough to get the shells ready for Thanksgiving. So yeah, my family they've always been willing to step in wherever needed my brothers. They show up at all my events. They, they still pay for pie. So it's cool to have my family cheering me on.

[00:28:40] **David Crabill:** Well, you mentioned that you're an introvert and I always relate to that. Cause that's how I am. I'm an introvert and starting a business has been a learning experience. So how, What has it been like being an introvert and starting and owning a business and running a business where you have to kind of be the face of the business.

[00:29:02] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah, it's been, it's been interesting. A lot of the interactions that I have with people are still very intimate. You know, people come to the house, they pick up their pies, we mask up chat a little bit. Usually I'll have them just pull up to my garage. So it's like a drive by. But as an introvert, kind of the more I see you, the more I warm up to you.

So it's not too bad. It's not like I'm public speaking or anything like that. But what I do start a new market, it's a little intimidating. There are certain days at markets where I see a lot of regulars and that's great, you know, regulars, happy to see you. They know what they want, have a great day. And then there's other days where I get a lot of new customers who want to know, you know, the ins and outs of my pie baking.

So I kinda just have to, to get my rest in and suck it up and do the best I can with being a little extroverted for a few hours.

[00:30:02] **David Crabill:** I saw that you've done a really good job of posting on social media. And oftentimes you'll come in with personal stuff about your life. And uh, that's one of those areas where I feel like extroverted people are a lot more willing to share about their own life in social media. So has that been uncomfortable for you or has that been something that you've intentionally done to, you know, boost the popularity of your page? How, how has it been kind of putting yourself out there online?

[00:30:35] **Kourtney Rojas:** It's funny. Cause I have a joke with some of my friends that we always overshare, you know, even though we're introverts people ask us like, Hey, how are you? And then you dig into some trauma or like overshare. So we laugh about that. But with my page, I try to be as real as possible. Because I'm a writer.

I graduated with an English degree, so I love writing. I love reading. Instagram to me is more than just pictures of my pies. Like I want people to know me. I want people to know what what's up with my family. And I also want people to know it's not all rainbows and butterflies. One of the reasons I dragged my feet a long time on Instagram was I had a personal page in the past.

And for me, it's just a lot of comparison. It's not all that healthy to get on Instagram, even as a business owner. Sometimes I'll find myself on Instagram and I start to get into that place where I'm like, oh, I should be doing more, like, look at that event that, that person's doing, or that person posted all those pies or cupcakes or cookies.

And they must have a huge event. Like why don't I have that? So I try to keep it real, just so people know. Yeah. Instagram it's not real life. Like it can be if we're honest and open, but try not to get on there. And this is for myself too. I try not to get on there and start comparing myself to others.

I try to just tell it like it is for me, my experience, my struggles, you know, it's just so people know, Hey, it's not that I just don't want to bake you a pie. It's that? I'm, I'm in the weeds right now and I'm doing the best I can. And that's all I can do.

[00:32:19] **David Crabill:** I can tell that you've done a really good job of boosting your social media pages and presence. I see you've got thousands of followers at this point, I think so. You're doing a great job there. I do want to talk a little bit about your pies themselves though. Cause I just see review after review online at people saying they're the best pies I've ever had. They're so amazing. What is it about your pies that makes them so great.

[00:32:44] **Kourtney Rojas:** Uh, Everybody tells me it's the crust. That's what they love. They love the flakiness. I don't know, people just come up to me And they say a lot of people don't get the crust right. But you got it. Right. So I kind of just smile and say, thank you. I know that pie is it's very personal and it could be very different, you know, some bakers.

Pre cook their feelings like for an apple pie. So their apple pie is maybe it's a little bit more gelatinous rich. Um, A lot of my pies are fruit forward, so a lot of fresh fruit. I use half blueberries, whole blueberries in my blueberry pie filling. I just use a little bit of sugar.

I try to use fruits that are in season. I think a lot of people love my pies, maybe just because they've never had an actual home-baked pie before. And going back to, the other bakers that I grew up with Marie calendars and polly's. I have great memories of those pies. But I think when people try my pies, they're kind of blown away like, oh, this, this is a pie.

This is maybe what pies could taste. Like, I don't want to say should taste like, but it just kind of opens their minds like, oh right. I get a lot of people that tell me, I didn't know. I liked pie. I thought I didn't like pie. And then they try my pie. I think it's the crust that they love.

[00:34:12] **David Crabill:** And what is it about the crust that makes it unique if you're, if you're willing to share some of your secrets.

[00:34:18] **Kourtney Rojas:** Uh, You know, I'm not really, my husband gets a little bit mad at me when I, excuse me when I share, I'm not afraid someone's going to take my recipe and run off with it. Pie baking is a lot of work. And I say, if people want to do that, Good luck to them have fun. But I don't know. I use all butter.

I use actually whole grains. I have the privilege of, I partnered up with a local bakery in long beach and they actually mill their own flour. So they mill their

own berries. I haven't got there yet. That's an extra step, but I do. You use organic whole wheat flour. So I care about the flour just as much as I care about the fruit and it's all butter.

I, I don't, you know, I don't know. I guess it's the way I handle the dough. It's just really flaky. It kind of melts in your mouth and people seem to love it. So, I'm not going to change the recipe.

[00:35:17] **David Crabill:** So, what are some of the pies that you're selling? It looked like you've sold a ton of different types of pies. What are some of the most popular ones?

[00:35:27] **Kourtney Rojas:** So, yeah, over the years, that's a lesson I've learned as well is to kind of whittle my menu down a little bit. People ask me for specific pies and learning to just say, no, people ask me for cherry pies in the winter, I don't use frozen cherries. So sorry, you're going to have to wait until May, June.

But apples salted caramel. Apple is my signature apple pie. So I no longer do double-crust or lattice apple pies. I just stick to my signature. So it's, you know, a combination of apples with a brown butter crumble and a homemade caramel sauce. That's probably the most popular pie that I sell. And then other than that, everything seasonal right now in California, we have some great peaches.

So I'm doing a lot of peach pies. I try to highlight that and push those, trying to kind of show people that we can eat seasonally and what to look for. You know, so you're not, you get to the point where you don't ask me for a cherry pie in February. I also do strawberry rhubarb, which is not very common around here.

People love, well, people that know what strawberry rhubarb pie is, love it. And I've been lucky enough to have my mom and my grandmother and a friend of mine. They all grow their own rhubarb. So I'm able to get rhubarb that way. And during rhubarb season, which their plants grow pretty year round um, I get a lot of people that really love that pie.

It's nostalgic to them.

[00:36:57] **David Crabill:** Do you have any non fruit pies?

[00:37:01] **Kourtney Rojas:** So I do a chocolate chess pie and a lemon chess pie. And a lot of people in California don't know what chess pie is. Um, It's a Southern pie. So I describe it as the chocolate is like a rich fudgy brownie in a pie shell. And the lemon is like a lemon bar in a pie shell. And I brought those onto the menu because I know not everyone likes fruit pies, but with a cottage food permit, I'm unable to sell cream pies from the house.

So I can't do chocolate cream or pumpkin, even banana cream, coconut cream. And when I started the business and I got my cottage food permit, that was, I was a little nervous about that because to be honest with you, I was selling pumpkin pies. Prior to that. And I thought, if I'm not selling pumpkin pies during November, like, how am I going to get any business I'm going to be dead, but I still have a lot of business without those certain types of pies.

[00:38:00] **David Crabill:** Well, I know you said you worked in a bakery back in college. You obviously have food service experience in the back of the house of a restaurant. So you're really familiar with the commercial kitchen space. I know you want to stay at home with your kids, but does part of you want to expand at some point into a commercial kitchen, so you can start making more items like custards and the cream pies?

[00:38:24] **Kourtney Rojas:** You know, I'm not really sure yet. I actually, last September, we remodeled our kitchen. So we're in a smaller town home. The kitchen was built in the seventies. I got it completely remodeled. And during that time I had the opportunity to rent from a commercial kitchen. And that was cool because it gave me a little glimpse of what life might be like, what business might be like if I decided to go that route.

And honestly, right now, it just wasn't for me renting somewhere by the hour with just me as one person is it's hard because as soon as I walk through that door, the time has started and I'm paying for every minute that I'm there, whether I'm mixing or boxing or peeling. So for me, a commercial kitchen is not, it's not on my list of things that I want to do anytime soon.

[00:39:19] **David Crabill:** So you're sticking to the fruit pies right now. Now, how have the prices of your pies changed over time?

[00:39:28] **Kourtney Rojas:** The prices of my pies from 2011, I was, I was practically giving them away. I honestly was giving them away. I did the wedding As a gift. I did my brother's wedding as a gift. I did a friend's wedding

as a gift. And then that Thanksgiving, when I did sell a few pies, I think I may be sold my apple pie for like \$25, \$20.

And now my salted caramel apple 9" pie starts at 34. I think the cheapest pie I have is 32 and the most expensive is 38. I go completely off of the price of fruit. You know, when blueberries go up up, I have to raise my blueberry pie price just a little bit apples, usually stay about the same.

So I definitely have seen an increase in my high prices, but it's all based off of the ingredients that I was using then versus the ingredients that I'm using now. Nothing against Costco flour, but you know, you can get a 50 pound bag of flour at Costco for I think, 10 bucks. And I'm paying, 50 to \$65 for a 50 pound bag of flour.

And that's my choice. Those are the grains that I choose to use. So my prices reflect that and I've learned over the years, just through talking to other cottage bakers, you kinda gotta go with you with what you believe in and what you want your product to be. And the people that value it will pay for it.

And those that don't won't and that's okay.

[00:41:00] **David Crabill:** As you've increased your prices. Have you noticed people drop off or get disappointed or, or buy less?

[00:41:09] **Kourtney Rojas:** No, I haven't. I really haven't. I feel like people really appreciate a homemade pie and people that are pie bakers know the amount of time that goes into baking a pie.

[00:41:21] **David Crabill:** Have you ever thought about increasing your prices to kind of organically drop the demand?

[00:41:29] **Kourtney Rojas:** No, I haven't. But somebody, I think my mentor actually did recommend that. I mean, it makes me feel bad,

but yeah, no, I mean, you know what, there's, there's a lot of bakers in LA, and they're charging \$50, \$42 to \$50 a pie. One of them is a well-known chef and she's out there shopping the Santa Monica farmer's market, or she'll go up north and pick her own peaches.

So, you know, there's no shame in that. Like, this is what it costs and if you want it, you do, if you don't, you don't like, I'm not gonna sell you a \$25 pie when I just picked these peaches myself. yeah, my husband's bolder on that end, where he's like, you need to charge more and I'm like, I still remember that person that jumped back when I told her the price.

She physically jumped back when I told her and I just looked her in the eye and I said, I'm sorry, but these pies take a long time to bake. You know, it's a labor of love and that was it. I don't, I don't take it personal. It's okay.

[00:42:36] **David Crabill:** So what I know that you sell full pies, nine inch pies, you also sell hand pies. Um, How much do you sell of each and are the hand pies more profitable for you?

[00:42:49] **Kourtney Rojas:** That's a good question. Now that I'm back opening for home pickups, I still sell more whole pies than I do the hand pies. Even at the farmer's markets. People know what a whole pie is, but when they see hand pies on the menu, they're kind of perplexed. Like what is what's hand pie? So I try to just explain it as like a pop tart.

People love them. they come around to them once they try them more profitable. Yes and no. Yes for cost of ingredients, because a hand pie obviously is just maybe a teaspoon and a half of filling where as a whole pie is, you know, eight cups. But for me, whole pies will always, they just, they're easier for me to bake. They're easier for me to assemble. So it's kind of a gray area.

[00:43:40] **David Crabill:** what do you sell outside of your full pies? I mean, do you have other things on your menu?

[00:43:47] **Kourtney Rojas:** I have three inch mini pies and I sell those by the dozen. I do what I call a Baker's choice dozen. So I do four different flavors, usually seasonal flavors, no substitutions. And those are really, really popular. I've done a lot of weddings with those pies. Baby showers, barbecues.

I work with a private chef, so he cooks for people in their homes and he likes to order those and take them to his clients for their dessert portion of their meal. So those, I think people look at those. Cute. Cute is the first thing that comes to their mind. A little mini pie. Sometimes it has a lattice top and they're just drawn to them because they're so cute.

So those, those are great. I really like those.

[00:44:36] **David Crabill:** Now, I know you sell at the farmer's market and you also sell, I guess you stopped doing the home pickup for a while, but you're storing that up again. Do you offer any delivery?

[00:44:47] **Kourtney Rojas:** I do delivery sometimes for weddings, I should probably should, but I, I don't charge if it's, if it's here in Anaheim and it's down the street, I don't mind just dropping it by. Other than that, I don't, I don't do deliveries. I did in the beginning of the pandemic, I thought, oh yeah, no big deal.

I can deliver these pies because someone in a different state had ordered one for her brother or something. And, that happened a couple of different times where I was, you know, you think you're going to the neighboring city, but it could be on the other side of that city. And then you got to go to the other city.

It's just, it's a lot of work to deliver. So I, I set that boundary pretty firm I haven't wavered on it. It's just easier if you'd like a pie, this is my address. Come pick it up.

[00:45:35] **David Crabill:** And uh, where else do you sell your pies?

[00:45:40] **Kourtney Rojas:** Right now I work with a local coffee shop and I do hand pies for them. So I do Mondays and Fridays. I drop off a few dozen of the heart shaped hand pies for them, and then they sell them. So I guess that's kind of like my wholesale side of the business that I haven't really ventured too far into. At one time I thought I would go further into that.

I had my husband kind of going out to different coffee shops and meeting with the owners and talking about opportunities, but I find that smaller orders direct to consumer work better for me, but I do sell at one coffee shop and then also a local ice cream shop. We work together. Um, I don't do consistent orders with them.

You can't find my pies there all the time, but over the summer, what we did is we call it a piescream sandwich. So two of my hand pies with their ice cream sandwiched between them, those have been really popular.

[00:46:36] **David Crabill:** Now you said that you were, I guess, interested in doing more wholesale, but then you sort of retreated from that. What turned you away from the wholesale?

[00:46:47] **Kourtney Rojas:** Honestly, the pricing, it's hard to go super low with my pricing for wholesale. I had a meeting with a coffee shop. It was towards the beginning of the pandemic. We did a collaboration together and my husband and I went out there to sit down with the owner and she was kind of just trying to get me to get my price as low as possible to the point where she even suggested that I buy premade

pie filling from Amazon. So it was just like, you know, there's not a lot of corners that I can cut to make my pies super, super cheap when they're so labor intensive. So I didn't really want to go. The wholesale route have had people in the past reach out to me and say, you know, I'm looking to supply pies for three restaurants.

Could you give me some prices? And to me it just sounds like a lot of work and not a lot of money where I think I'm doing okay with just doing these personal orders and I'm happier doing them less of them rather than more wholesale.

[00:47:56] **David Crabill:** Well, one reason to do the wholesale, just because you don't have to think about the marketing aspect of it, right. You just make the pie and drop it off, but it sounds like it's already kind of the way that's working for you or the orders just roll in, like people have a strong demand for your pie and I guess too much demand for your pie.

So you don't have to maybe do as much marketing. Is that, is that accurate?

[00:48:20] **Kourtney Rojas:** I think it's pretty accurate. I mean, this is my first week not doing the Sunday market and the beginning of the week rolls around and I think to myself, you know, should I should put the gas on the pedal a little bit? should I do a home pickup this week? Okay. Yeah, I have some time. Let's do it.

So I do it. I have pickups today. As a matter of fact, there's not too many. And then, you know, things start rolling around already for next week, kind of bigger orders and different events. And it's just kind of a reminder from the universe. Like you're going to be okay. Even if you're not at this market right

now, at this time in your life, at this time in the business's life people, aren't going to forget about you.

And I think that's one of the fears I had when I first started out. When I first started out, I was reaching out to the wedding vendors and I was donating pies for their events, for their, mixers, whatever workshops, doing a lot of pro bono stuff, just to get my items out there so they could try them.

And they knew who I was giveaways, collaboration and stuff like that. I was very eager and I did a lot of that stuff. And I said yes to a lot of things in the beginning, because I think I was. I had some fear in me that I wasn't gonna make it, or I needed people to know I was here and now, you know, just two years later, it's I don't have to do those things anymore.

I can look back at those things and kind of laugh at my, my younger self for doing them. You know, it's all part of the journey, but definitely wouldn't recommend that to someone who's just starting out. I would say more watch out for that kind of stuff. Like you don't have to do that kind of stuff.

[00:50:02] **David Crabill:** Well, as you've done more of the home pickups and you have been reaching out to people directly, I know you have your Instagram, but I also saw you that you have a newsletter. So you're emailing people. How has the newsletter supported your business?

[00:50:17] **Kourtney Rojas:** The newsletter has been a good tool. I use it directly through my website, post Squarespace. It's been good because I know not everyone's on Instagram. I know I have some customers that don't do social media. Some that I don't see every week at the market, maybe I lost touch with them in person.

So the newsletter is kind of like a, to me, it's like a VIP list. I send a newsletter out pretty sporadically. I'm trying to get better at it. Just to give people updates like, Hey, I'm not doing this market anymore. Or, Hey, I'm starting this market. Or my pies will be at this coffee shop. I'm taking a break.

We're not going to be doing pickups for this week or that week. And then also for Thanksgiving, I use the newsletter, the email newsletter as kind of a, a perk. So when I do my Thanksgiving sale, which I usually launch in October, I shoot the newsletter out to newsletter subscribers at least 24 hours in advance so they can get on that list and they can get their time slot.

Before I turn it over to Instagram,

The problem with Instagram that I'm finding now is I know people talk about it a lot, the algorithm, and you know, now they want you to post more reels in order to be seen. And I've, I've actually noticed a lot. I don't put too much time into it, but just by glancing at the story views.

So when I post a story of the 3000 followers, I have. If 600 of them saw it, that was kind of a good number, but that number is going down to like 200. So I'm, I'm trying to change a little bit. I'm trying to get a little bit better with posting reels so I can stay active on there and let people see me.

[00:52:06] **David Crabill:** I noticed that on Instagram, you did do a giveaway. 2000 followers. how did that go?

[00:52:14] **Kourtney Rojas:** It went well. I, I think I did a giveaway when I hit 1k and 2k. Um, I've done a giveaway with the ice cream shop that I work with. We did it. I think it was February the last giveaway that I did. And I did those to get more exposure. You do the whole, like, like this post, tag a friend, follow me, follow them. it did help a lot. haven't done one just for that.

same reason. I don't have the time, a lot of it is time, you know, it's like, you want me to post a reel and do a giveaway and send a newsletter and send an invoice and update my website and bake pies all at the same time. Like it's, it just becomes a lot of work when baking the pies is what I am here for.

[00:53:03] **David Crabill:** As you've run this business over the last few years. Are there any moments or stories that stand out to you?

[00:53:11] **Kourtney Rojas:** Um, you know, there's no, at that I can think of at this moment, there are no huge stories. But it's the little things, you know, it's somebody picking up mini pies telling me that the occasion is that their sister has stage four cancer and this is going to be their last gathering together, or someone telling me that they love their pies.

Everyone at their wedding loved them. The person who orders a strawberry rhubarb every year, because that is her anniversary with her husband and they had it at their wedding. You know, just my son. Grabbing pies off of my baking rack that he's not supposed to. It's those little moments. I had a guy at the farmer's market, an older gentleman.

He came, he bought some of the hand pies. Actually, he came back the next week and he just told us this story about how his grandmother used to bake pies. And my crust reminded him of her crust. So little things like that, they really do as cliché as it sounds, they really do warm my heart and those little things are what keeps me going and keeps me doing it.

You know, it's pie and maybe it's just pie, but people make memories over these pies. And I really, I really enjoy that.

[00:54:32] **David Crabill:** Well, you've obviously done a fantastic job building up a following and, and starting your own cottage food operation. But I did notice that you also helped your brother, I think. And sister-in-law, so you've been passing along the tradition. Can you talk a little bit about how you helped them start a business?

[00:54:52] **Kourtney Rojas:** Yeah. So the good thing about cottage food bakers, that I've, like realized over the years that people are very open to. Giving advice and tips. It really is community over competition in this world that I've found.

So when people give me advice freely, then it inspires me to give advice freely if people want it. So yeah, last year when we were remodeling the kitchen, we thought, oh, what better time than now? Since we don't have a working kitchen to go to Arizona and stay with my brother and his family. And while we were out there, we just thought, cool, let's bake some pies out here.

See how people like 'em sell some of them. So I went out there and I had baked these pies for his wedding. He was the brother who got married, who I baked for, and his wife actually. They weren't married at the time, but she was the sister-in-law that was helping me with my first wedding when we were running around in my mom's house with those pies.

So uh, her and I had talked in the past about doing something like a little side hustle when they used to live here. So when we went out to visit, I baked some pies and we sold some of them. And again, it wasn't intentional. It wasn't the plan for me to go out there and teach him to bake and sell pies. But that's what happened. So yeah, I taught him, I gave him my crust recipe and I gave him a couple of my fruit pie recipes and showed him some techniques and told them, you know, this is where I get my pie, tins wholesale. This is where I get my

boxes. You're going to want to go through your local county to get your own cottage food permit.

If this is what you want to do. And, you know, I showed him and told him the steps that I took and now they are taking them themselves. And it's a little different over there because they don't have farmer's markets because it's too hot during the summer. So I just talked to my sister-in-law this week and they're getting ready to start their local.

I think there's this once a month, so they're getting ready to start that in September. So they seem to be enjoying.

[00:57:02] **David Crabill:** Well, it's cool to hear how you're passing along the tradition in your family. And it's also cool to hear how, how family oriented your businesses and how, how small it is and how it's organically grown over time. So, um, thank you for sharing with us today. And if people want to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:57:23] **Kourtney Rojas:** Um, They can find me on, I have a website it's [www.withlovepie.com](http://www.withlovepie.com). I'm also on Instagram at with love period from scratch. Those are the best two ways to get ahold of me, my Facebook page is still there, but it's not very active. I think it's just linked to Instagram and it posts when I post.

[00:57:50] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much for coming on sharing with us.

[00:57:54] **Kourtney Rojas:** Thank you, David. I appreciate it.

[00:57:58] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/43](http://forrager.com/podcast/43).

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and finally, if you're thinking about starting your own pie business, check out my free mini course, where I walk you through the steps you need to take to

get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to [cottagefoodcourse.com](http://cottagefoodcourse.com).

Thanks for listening. And I'll see you in the next episode.