

How To Build A Food Business (And Life) That You Love with Sari Kimbell – Part 1

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where we talk about strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with Sari Kimbell.

Sari lives in Fort Collins, Colorado, and runs a consulting business called Food Business Success.

Unlike most of my guests, Sari has not started a cottage food business herself, but she has helped many food entrepreneurs over the years, including many cottage food entrepreneurs. As you'll see, Sari has a wealth of food business knowledge to share. She has done so much in the food industry, including working as a marketing director at whole foods, owning a farmer's market and running a shared commercial kitchen. And now she works directly with early stage food entrepreneurs to help get their business idea off the ground.

In this two-part episode, she shares much of what she's learned along the way, including what mistakes entrepreneurs make, how to have the right expectations when building a business, how to scale a food business into wholesale and how to build a profitable food business.

As I said, this is a two-part episode today. You'll hear part one and next week I'll publish part two, which you definitely won't want to miss.

Also coming next week, Sari is giving an amazing workshop on how to increase your sales at farmer's markets. I have personally vetted the content for this workshop and trust me when I say that if you sell at markets or events, you will want to see this.

As I said, Sari literally owns a farmer's market and she has a ton of great tips to share that workshop will happen next Friday, April 22nd. And if you can't join live, You can still access the replay. Look down in the show notes for a link to sign up.

And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

Welcome to the show. Sari Nice to have you here.

[00:01:40] **Sari Kimbell:** Thanks, David it's really fun to be on your podcast.

[00:01:43] **David Crabill:** Yeah. Well, I know I was on your podcast at one point, and it's finally good to have you on the show, but man, you've done so many things in the food industry over the years. Um, I just want to go back to the beginning and uh, you know, where did this journey I'll get started for you?

[00:02:01] **Sari Kimbell:** I feel like food has been a big theme through my life. Starting, even in my twenties, I moved to San Francisco and started waiting tables and got really involved with like the farm to table scene and, you know, local food and.

scratch-made food. and then moving back to Colorado, I was actually a teacher at one point, and then I worked in real estate and then I got laid off and I went to work for a farm.

Cause that's what you do when you get laid off from real estate in 2008, during a recession, And I started selling wholesale into restaurants grocery stores. The farm did not have a sales program, so I just created this program and started figuring it out.

And I was selling, um, produce meat and eggs up and down the front range of Colorado where I live. I was also selling direct to, our local whole foods stores in Colorado. And I was just meeting all the chefs and meeting the people at whole foods.

And then I made the switch, from the farm over to whole foods. So I started as a buyer in my local whole foods market store in Fort Collins. So I learned a lot about purchasing and, your margins and inventory and all of those pieces. I was at the retail or at the regional level for, whole foods market in Boulder And I, was basically like finding these local brands. And as we went into new markets, we were opening a store in Boise. And, uh, Helping vendors, producers be more successful in the whole foods environment, because oftentimes we were bringing people from the farmer's market and saying, we want you on our store shelves.

And then I moved over to the, um, back to the store level and I was the marketing director for the store, and I just had a real focus on local products, local vendors. We did a lot of, community programming and events around local.

So I just was always focused on how can we get them on the shelves, but then more importantly, how do we get them? Get those products off the shelf, into people's baskets Um, So I was laid off in 2015 from whole foods after four and a half years. And I helped a friend with opening her restaurant. Um, So again, food has been the theme through all of this. And then I actually managed a commissary kitchen, So I was meeting all of these wonderful folks that are potentially listening here.

You know, people moving from cottage food, wanting to come into a commercial kitchen, wanting to scale up or people who couldn't do cottage food right. Coming in from the beginning. And they all were so excited to start this business and be in this kitchen and start selling their product. But I would start asking them questions about their business model or their licensing or food safety and things like that.

And they would just kind of look at me like, what are you talking about? Like, I just want to come and make my food. And so I just saw a real opportunity there and I just have such a heart for, I was just like, these are my people. I really want to help these people be more successful. And so that is where food, business success. And my, my consulting and now coaching business was started, back in, uh, that would have been 2016. So here we are.

[00:05:32] **David Crabill:** Wow. You threw a lot of stuff in there, but, did I hear that right? That if it weren't for the recession, you may never have gone

[00:05:38] **Sari Kimbell:** Yeah, there we go. Thank you. Housing crisis, 2008. Yes.

[00:05:45] **David Crabill:** That's crazy. And then, I mean, you're in real estate at the time, but obviously you're super passionate about food. Did that just get developed on the farm? Or like, why are you so passionate about.

[00:05:55] **Sari Kimbell:** when I moved to San Francisco, I moved to San Francisco, literally because I went there to visit a friend who had just moved there and I fell in love with the food and the culture and it like woke something up in me that I hadn't

experienced in Fort Collins, Colorado, it's a great place, But it was inspired in me. And I'm sure so many of your listeners can feel that too, of like, that's why they make this delicious food, because food brings people together.

It gets people sitting at a table communing and creating connection that you can't. I find it hard to replicate any other way.

[00:06:37] **David Crabill:** But it's not just food. Like it's like food mixed in with this marketing and sales piece. Cause it seems like every step of the way, like you worked at the farm, you grew their sales by a ton. Then you went to whole foods and you went through multiple phases of that career where you end up being the marketing director.

Right. And building stores. And so, You know, it seems like you kind of have this nice combination of both being passionate about the food. But also having the sales chops.

[00:07:05] **Sari Kimbell:** Thanks. I think I'm really good at just getting in there and I'll figure it out. Like I'm pretty resilient and I feel like I can really enjoy the numbers as well as the creativity. But I think food is just always been the, the thread through it all.

And so I couldn't have been like, oh, this is what I'm gonna do when I'm in my forties, But now I look back and I say, oh, that's how it was all supposed to come together. Right. I needed to do all of these different things because now I can bring this whole skillset, of the business aspect of it and the numbers and also the creativity and the marketing and the sales and all of that together, and really help people with the whole package.

Because there's lots of people who make really great food, but not everybody wants to be an entrepreneur. food, maybe the passion and the why you're doing it. But then we also have to step into being a business. Now cottage food gives us such

easier door to walk through, but we still have to do the things that are required of us as a business owner than just making our product.

[00:08:18] **David Crabill:** Yeah. You said that when you went into, managing this commissary kitchen, that people would walk in just wanting to sell their food and you'd start talking to them about, you know, what's your plan, what's your strategy, all that stuff. So, what were some of the things that you noticed in those entrepreneurs that, gave you an indication that they might not do so well with their business? If they just came in, focused on the.

[00:08:41] **Sari Kimbell:** some things that lead me to believe like, okay, this might just be a flash in the pan are, underestimating the investment that it's

going to take and not necessarily in money, although that is helpful too, but kind of just the investment in themselves and their time.

If people kind of feel like, oh, this is just gonna be really easy and they're not really in a learning mindset, they're not listening and, open to feedback. do see those folks kind of crash and burn pretty quickly because they really underestimate, maybe what's required of them,

[00:09:19] **David Crabill:** do most of these people come in, having no experience or do you often have people coming into the commissary kitchen having already run some kind of food business, either illegally or cottage food? Or are you talking about people just coming in totally.

[00:09:33] **Sari Kimbell:** totally blind. Yeah. it's more of the, Hey, I have this really great idea and I'll say, oh, great. Have you thought about this? Or what about that? And, they'll say, That's not for me. Or I'll figure it out later. Or, I have, uh, I have a guy, uh, you know, I have a cousin who's going to do that.

Things like that. It's like the people who are really I can tell who are really invested, they're in a learning mindset. And, you know, I work with a lot of people now who this is their very first time running a business, you know, stepping into entrepreneurship, So, I would say generally I work with people who have never been in the food industry before. So just that willingness to learn and be open and kind of a sponge, like soaking it all in and not coming in and being so fixed.

Like I got it all figured out, just sign my piece of paper and let me work in this kitchen.

[00:10:29] **David Crabill:** Yeah, absolutely. Gotta be adaptable. you know, talking about people coming in, having no experience in the food industry whatsoever, you're, joining people's journey. Just getting started. Like, I feel like most consultants, most people don't like support businesses at that stage.

Right. They feel like, people kind of have to figure it out on their own when they're starting out. And then maybe once they start to find success, that's when they'd hire a coach or they'd hire a consultant. So, what drives you to support these really high risk businesses? Right.

Businesses are at a high risk of failure. I don't feel like most consultants or coaches do.

[00:11:04] **Sari Kimbell:** Yeah, you're absolutely right. I don't know a very many people outside of you and I at work with the very early stage entrepreneur. Yeah. Like I said, I just, meeting with people at the kitchen when I first was getting started really inspired me. I just have such a heart for people in those early stages of entrepreneurship and you already know how to make your product.

That part sort of figured out for the most part, but what's probably not figured out is the entrepreneurship piece and not even just the nuts and bolts like the legal and financial, but, you know, I talk a lot now more about mindset and like doing hard things and being resilient and showing up and risking rejection, right?

I mean the beauty of entrepreneurship and the beauty of cottage food, especially is that you can start with a minimal investment rather than, I mean, I have some clients that I work with that are, you know, it's a \$30,000 investment. It's a \$50,000 investment. So the cottage food level, we can definitely risk less, but entrepreneurship allows us to build our muscles around resilience and around showing up and putting ourselves out there and taking risks that we just can't get any other way. You know, it's a curriculum of life that it helps you to be a better person and grow and evolve.

[00:12:35] **David Crabill:** So you went through a lot of the stuff that you've done, but you've done so much stuff that you left out some major pieces, right? I mean, you not only manage, but you own a farmer's market, right.

[00:12:49] **Sari Kimbell:** Correct. Yeah. I forget about that piece. It's like a side hustle for me.

Yes. So I own the Fort Collins, winter farmer's market. I manage that. It's in the winter. So it's inside. Which was an interesting thing. So it's Colorado, right? It gets cold. And then when COVID hit, obviously we got shut down, towards the end of our season. But, we actually increased the number of vendors. I saw a lot of people starting businesses, with COVID, uh, after we got past the initial shock of it all, so yeah, we, we can host up to like 80 vendors, during the holiday season and we typically have about 50 vendors and we go November through April is our season.

[00:13:39] **David Crabill:** yeah, so, I mean, you've done all these things, right? Worked at whole foods, worked on a farm, run the farmer's market, have a consulting business, ran a commissary kitchen. So all these things are like

helping support other food businesses. Right. So the natural question would be, have you started your own food business?

[00:13:59] **Sari Kimbell:** Um, so I was running the commissary. The answer is yes. a friend of mine, a good friend, she has a garlic business. So she sells, garlic for seed and planting or eating, online. And it's like the largest retailer online of garlic, But, they have the most amazing, beautiful garlic. So she was telling me one day and she said, the most search for term on my website is black garlic. And if any of you guys don't know what black garlic is, it's, a culinary, garlic like it's used in restaurants and it's not a specific type of garlic.

It's actually a garlic bulb has been under heat and humidity. It changes its chemistry and it becomes soft. it's like it's aged and it turns black and it's much sweeter.

It kind of tastes like balsamic and figs together. It's really interesting. we knew that chefs wanted it. Right. So there was, we knew we had a market demand. I knew all these chefs from my time at the farm, and whole foods of course, and all these things.

Right. So we knew we had demand. We had amazing garlic that we could get at wholesale. And then I'm working in a, you know, managing a commissary kitchen. So it's like, this just seems like a no brainer, right? Like, yeah, let's do this. So we form a partnership. We are trying to figure out how to do this in, you know, a bigger scale scaling up, uh, which I talk a lot about scaling up and that this is one of the biggest challenges for, producers.

So we buy this proofer because we need heat and humidity and we, we kind of figure out like, okay, I think this kind of bread proofer will work. We made the mistake of like filling it with probably like 20 trays of garlic thinking like, oh, it's going to work perfectly the very first time. And then two weeks, we're going to have this amazing garlic.

Well, it did not go that way at all. We had constant issues with the, humidity and the heat, not staying at the same level. And we brought in somebody to help try to tinker with the machine and do all of these things. I look back now. I'm like, oh my gosh. So we wasted all of those garlic. Then we got smart and only did like a small batch at a time, but.

What happened is things got hard, right? As they do, when you have a business, it doesn't all just work out the first time and you have this amazing product, and you just start selling it and turning it on. That is very rarely if never the case. So

once things got a little hard and things weren't working, I honestly just was like, I just don't really have a heart for this. And I really use that as such a great learning tool and a message, uh, with people is that you got to have a really strong why? Because we had everything going for us. We had the market, we had demand, we had the garlic, we had the kitchen, but we didn't, I didn't have a strong why I didn't like love this garlic so much.

And I just have to get it out and share it with the world. That's how I feel about my current business?

Now. Like I have to help people, this is my message. I have to help them have a better experience, but I didn't feel that way about this garlic. So a couple of, failed attempts. And I just was like, eh, my heart's not in it.

I don't really want to do this. So, but I learned So much from that process of trying it myself.

[00:17:40] **David Crabill:** So did you feel like you just wouldn't really have the heart and running your own food business in any capacity?

[00:17:48] **Sari Kimbell:** Um, if I found that food that I just was like, oh my gosh, I have to share this with the world. This is the most amazing thing. then, yeah, potentially. I mean, this is not an easy business to be wildly successful in. Now. I think we'll talk more about like how to create a business, a lifestyle business that does work for you.

But, it can be a challenging business to make good margins in, and it depends on if you want to go into wholesale and online and all the places. But, I don't know that I would want to I'd want it to be more of a hobby business. I think where I just want to like share my food with the world. Or now that I know what I know after doing this for six years, I would hire the right people in place and really go big, right.

Make a big investment and go all in and have the food made for me and hire the right people. That's probably one of those ways, either a hobby business where I'm just spreading the love or I'd go all in on like going big.

[00:18:56] **David Crabill:** So do you think that's a requirement like to have this mission or purpose behind your business or like, if somebody just comes in and says, Hey, I just want to make some money versus the entrepreneur that says, Hey, I need to get my grandmother's pie into people's hands. Is that like a requirement for running a business.

[00:19:15] **Sari Kimbell:** going to say no, but I'm going to say, I'm going to qualify that with saying your rate of success and fun, having fun, doing this will be greatly affected by your commitment and your deep why? Especially if you don't have the big investment money behind you. So I, I do think that there are people like take my garlic example.

If I had a lot of money to throw at the problem and just hire people to build me a machine, or there was like some machines that we could have ordered that would have produced perfect garlic every time. But they were like \$10,000 shipped from China. Right. And I did not have that level of investment.

I don't think your why needs to be as strong. If you have the money behind you investing to back it up, you can kind of pay people to figure the stuff out. But when you have a small business, when you're, you know, launching early stage, you're that solo preneur, or you have a business partner, I do think your why needs to be really strong because it is the thing that will keep you going.

keep you getting out of bed, keep you showing up to that farmer's market. Even when it's hot, even when it's windy, even when it's rainy, it'll keep you making that product. Otherwise, it's going to fizzle out, right? I mean, it's like any goal, do you want to lose weight? Or you want to run a marathon? Like you gotta have a strong why that gets you out of bed.

[00:20:53] **David Crabill:** So you shared your own story, which is, you didn't have the why, so you know, the business kind of fizzled out. What about the opposite where, you know, you've seen someone maybe in the market, maybe in your kitchen and maybe one of your clients who has the why and has faced a really tough time and that why carried them through.

[00:21:14] **Sari Kimbell:** I think about April and Earl with better than provisions, they started as a cottage food business. Um, they're based in Tucson they don't have a big investment. They don't have a lot of money behind them when they started. It was very much, I make this amazing keto granola, and I just have to tell people about this, like this changed my life and my health, and I need to tell people about this.

And so it really started very organically, very small. And then they got track, you know, people were loving it and they started at one market and expanded and grew and they have had many challenges along the way. you know, I've been working with them for two years now, more in a coaching consultant capacity.

And there have been times where they have almost given up where they have almost thrown in the towel, but they keep coming back and they take those moments. And kind of, sometimes they'll be like, we're going to come back a couple of weeks. They'll refresh themselves. And they'll really dig deep and say why are we doing this?

And do we really want to continue? And then the answer has always been, yes. So they've been able to, they've been willing to make new investments, put themselves out there to raise money. And now they're in stores. They have new packaging that we created. They've really grown their online business. But yeah, I think that why gets constantly tested.

The world, right. Life happens. And it would be really easy to give up many, many times in our business if you don't have that strong why?

[00:22:50] **David Crabill:** Would you say that most of the food businesses that you see have a major struggle or do a lot of them have an easier time at building their businesses?

[00:23:00] **Sari Kimbell:** I think that there are some personalities that lend to an easier experience, personalities that are a little more easygoing, a little more like, okay, we're just gonna, we're gonna try this. We're gonna see if it works right. And less attachment to the outcome. one of the pitfalls I see people make is that they get attached to their business, as a way to complete them and fulfill them to prove their success.

When people do attach that, Those are the people I think, who really struggle a lot more and create more hardship, more suffering in the building of their business.

Because it leads to perfectionism, right. It leads to a lot of self-loathing and self judgment. So yeah, the people who can kind of come in a little bit lighter and be like a little more like a scientist and a little more playful and say, I'm just curious if I tried this, you know, what would happen?

And I find those types of, people who can come in that way, tend to try more things, put themselves out there. And they just kind of have a different energy about them, that people are attracted to. And so I think about one client who has hot sauce and he's he just texted me the other day and said, oh, the news just called.

And they want to feature me on, you know, a segment on the news. And it's like, how does he do that? You know? But I think he has a certain lightness about his business. Like he's still just really curious playing with it rather than making it his identity and like. Measure of worth in the world.

[00:24:45] **David Crabill:** Have you taken these ideas and put them into your own business? I mean, you obviously worked with all these different businesses for many years, and then you decided to set up your own business as consulting business in 2016. like, how has that gone? Has that been fairly seamless? Has, has that been a struggle?

[00:25:04] **Sari Kimbell:** So, you know how, like people who need the most therapy become therapists that is What has happened to me. So I am a coach that coaches entrepreneurs, because I did all of these things wrong. all the things I'm talking about was me. And sometimes still is me and is my biggest nemesis. So I was not a natural born entrepreneur. I did not grow up around entrepreneurship. In fact, my dad had a, he bought a franchise, which it was a cinnamon roll shop He was an engineer for Hewlett Packard. my mom was a stay at home mom. Like it was a very, like, you go to school, you get a stable job, you stay there forever. Well, he must have had a little entrepreneurial bug try this cinnamon roll shop and he had to close it down.

It was in a bad location, And I saw him go through a really painful period of like he had to pay back those loans and it was challenging for him and, not only was I not really around it, but I also saw, the hard, you know, the thing, the hard things that come with failing, I could retell that story and say, I actually learned that you can fail and you can get through it, right.

You can survive But in any case I would not have considered myself a natural entrepreneur. I was a teacher and then in real estate and then working for whole foods, like I had no desire to start my own business. So the last six years have been a journey of me figuring out all of those things, not attaching myself worth to my business, having fun, being playful and loose about it and being a scientist like, you know, you just kind of have these moments of inspiration and, just being looser with your business and not taking yourself so seriously. So the coaching tools that I use and share with my clients, it's because I've had to go through all of it and I have fought it along all along the way.

I have been the worst client, which makes me a great coach, right. Because I know all the things that people go through.

[00:27:15] **David Crabill:** What are some of the obstacles you've faced in your consulting business?

[00:27:18] **Sari Kimbell:** Oh, I think for me, the big, the big one was like rejection judgment, putting myself out there. when I launched food business?

success in 2019, which is the online program, I had a coach then and he told me I had to do 11 days of Facebook lives, every day I had to do a Facebook.

And I was like, I think my whole face went like flush and I was hot and I was like, no way. He's like, yeah, you, you just have to start. I was like, I mean, this is before reels, right. And Facebook lives were kind of the thing. because I'm a perfectionist and a recovering perfectionist, I didn't want any judgment, from others. I didn't want to be rejected, but I committed and I did it and I'm so proud of myself. And some days there were people on there and some days I was just talking to myself, some of them were terrible and some of them were really great, and now, you know, now I just like, I'm like, oh, I'm going to film a reel, or I'm gonna, you know, put on a video or a podcast.

And now it's pretty easy, but it's interesting now because people look at me in my industry or in coaching and they're like, oh, you have it all figured out. This must just come so naturally for you. And I'm like, no, you know how you do it. You just do it. you fail and you suck at it for a while and you, you know, it feels terrible.

That's how you get better at it. And so I think about people starting a cottage food business, and you're going to have to go set up at a farmer's market and put yourself out there and people tell you to do reels and Facebook posts. And You're going to put some really crappy stuff out there, but just do it, Cause that's what entrepreneurship is. It's just constantly putting yourself out there, one of the gals I've worked with, she's cottage food and she came to my farmer's market, was her very first market this year. And, uh, she's setting up first time setting up her table and, I was standing next to her and she's, this guy comes up and she's talking with him and he's like, yeah, I really want to try them.

and she just keeps talking about the bars and he's like, okay, I'm interested. And I finally was like give him a sample. He wants to try it. And so she does, and then he's like, oh, these are great. And she just keeps she's so nervous.

Right. And she just keeps talking he's like, well, I'll take some. And she just keeps talking and talking. And I said, he wants to buy. And she was like, oh, okay. Yeah. It's like, And he wanted five of them, but she only sold four packs

and single packs. And she was like, I don't sell five and I was like, yes, you do. He wants five, give him five. And now she's like a pro and now she's mentoring other people that I send her way.

you know, those are the moments that like, you're so nervous about that very first time. But you look at other market vendors and you're like, they're so confident.

They're so good at this. Well, you're looking at them after their hundredth market or they're, you know, 500 market. Like you just have to start and you're going to make some mistakes and it's going to be messy and you do it anyway. And then you're really proud of yourself for showing up.

[00:30:51] **David Crabill:** Yeah, absolutely. Business is like a rollercoaster and you just gotta get on it. Um, Was there a point where you felt like quitting your consulting business.

[00:31:03] **Sari Kimbell:** Yes. Um, yeah, I started in, 2016, but I was a consultant for the small business development center, which shout out to them. I highly recommend those as a great resource when you're starting a business, but. you know, they brought me in as a paid consultant to help people when they wanted to start packaged food businesses. So I was actually pretty busy, um, probably doing like maybe 10 hours a week there. And so I was really like honing my skills there and putting together resources and really, you know, like, like we talked about earlier, the people who I love to work with are often bootstrapping.

They don't have a lot of money. They don't really see the value in working with a coach or consultant or somebody like myself. They just want to do it themselves and figure it out. So, the SBDC was a great place because people could come and see me for free. But I had to fill the time, you know, fill up the rest of my work, work time with other things.

So I had a couple of one-on-one clients. I had a jam client. Um, She was my very first business that I took on packaged food as a paying client. I had a nonprofit and then I actually had a pharmaceutical client that was helping to pay the bills. Well, my two big clients, in 2018, completely imploded in the same month.

So in June Both entities, like shut their doors. So I found myself very quickly, without, you know, the income that I needed just to pay my bills. And then I got a cease and desist letter. A couple months later, I was trying to figure out what I

wanted to do. And then I got this cease and desist letter, about the name of my company.

So it was a different name back then when I first started and, somebody had a trademark on it. very official, legal document FedEx delivered to me. And I was just, I was like at my wit's end, like, what am I doing this for? This is so hard. I mean, there was a lot of like shame, but also.

I mean, a legal document, like there's attorneys, like, oh my gosh, what is happening here? And it was it's like, I had been advising people to check trademarks. Right. I tell other people to do that, but then like, I didn't do it for my own business. So things that we all learn and I pass on now, but, so that fall, I started looking for other jobs.

I was like, I think it's time. What am I doing this for? This is not working. I'm just going to go get a real job. I had a little runway, you know, from the severance and all of that from whole foods, but that had gotten really small and I felt a lot of pressure. I felt a lot of, anxiety. I started having panic attacks.

I was having panic attacks weekly. I'm like, what am I doing? So I actually, found a job. let's just say I was offered a job at the Colorado department of ag, which was essentially everything that I was wanting to do or was doing in my current business, but for the Colorado department of ag.

So it was for their local program. It was to help mentor producers. So it was like, I mean, of course I like nailed the interview. It was everything that I wanted to be doing. And they offered me the job and it was \$40,000 a year in Denver. And you had to be there in person. I was not living in Denver.

And I was like, I can't afford to live in Denver on this. Right. And so that was my moment. Right? Like I think the hero's journey, right. We Look back on our journey and we say, what are those pivotal moments that, you know, we're resilient and we bounce back and we try. Um, So I made a decision.

It was a really hard decision, you know, not to take that job, which seems safe and secure versus my panic attacks and my, you know, freaking out about the attorney and all the things. But I decided I was like, I'm going to give this one last go. I am going to dig deep. I'm going to recommit.

I shut off all the job notifications. and that's when I actually came up with the concept for food, business success to create this online program. And yeah, I just, I doubled down and I said, I paid a thousand dollars for a course that taught

you how to build courses. And the Friday after Thanksgiving, I took myself to a hotel in Denver and did a corporate retreat of one with myself and big sticky note pads.

And I wrote up everything that I wanted to be in this course and this program. And I just decided to recommit and go all in. And if it failed, it failed, but I was going to give it, you know, the next six months or as long as I could afford it. So yeah, I really almost quit. I changed the name of my business.

Of course. I just changed it to Sari Kimbell consulting. I had all these crazy names that weren't anything about my name and people were like, just use your name. People know you, they like you, they like your name. And I was like, okay, we'll go with that. So I did, and I guess the rest is history.

So yeah, I almost gave up, I almost quit.

[00:36:55] **David Crabill:** uh, we've been talking quite a bit about, failure, obstacles, challenges, you know, you can avoid a lot of these challenges if you, you know, follow the guidance of someone who's gone before you, so, for someone who's starting out as an entrepreneur or someone who enters your world, what are like the first three things that you would recommend that they do.

To maybe help themselves, uh, not go through such a difficult time with their business.

[00:37:21] **Sari Kimbell:** first of all, just finding mentors, finding guides, You know, just like I went and got that thousand dollar course on how to build courses, finding people who know what they're talking about and you and I both give away so many resources for free, like, start educating yourself, start learning the industry and what to expect when you get into this. as much as possible. I would say just really being open to learning really immersing yourself in that business side of it, because you know how to make your product, you know, what a great product is.

You probably spent years perfecting it and it's your signature recipe, or, you know, it's some new product that you've created that solves a problem. And so you got the product pretty well dialed in, but just being willing to like have a beginner's mindset and be like, I don't know everything, but I'm going to find people who do right. It's the who, that helps you with the house. So finding those guides that will help you come in and, and do it faster and skip the headaches, a lot of them and not spend money, you don't need to spend money

on yet. Right. And then spend money when you do need to do it, for the right things. So I'd say, yeah, finding the who to help you with the, how is the first thing, you know, really understanding your legal pieces around what you need to be doing, especially, you know, cottage, food is fairly easy, but, I think that the legal, and the kind of government regulation pieces can really, catch people off guard.

And so being willing to like. Get the right help when you need it at that, for those kind of things. Because we are, we're dealing with food and, you know, I always say like, if you want to start selling scarves, you just need to knit a bunch of scarves and you can turn it on tomorrow. But with food, you know, we are dealing with something that potentially could hurt somebody.

And there are a lot of oversight there's our whole FDA has oversight. And so I think that there's a tendency for people to want to just focus on the fun parts of the business, like the logo design and making the product and the marketing and, you know, those kind of things. But we just, we got to just do the hard things that aren't very fun, and make sure that we are dialed in, on our food safety pieces. especially as you go into a commercial license. And then I would say like, just checking your expectations at the door and, being willing to, I call it like smash the clock, right? Like everybody's in such a rush to get it to market. I'm constantly working with clients.

And so. Why are we in such a rush? Like let's slow it down a little bit. Let's do it right. we underestimate how much we can get done in a year and we overestimate how much we can get done in a month. Right. Or a couple of weeks, we think we can do all of these things. And I just find that, to do it right.

And legally, and safely and profitably, it does take longer than people think that it will. So just kind of managing your expectations that like it will take longer and it'll probably cost more than you think it will. And so if that's the case, do you still want to do this? And, and so it's a good to kind of ask yourself that question before you really jump all in, especially if you're going to go up to commercial license to the next level.

[00:41:05] **David Crabill:** What do you, when people come into your coaching world, what kind of expectations. Do you normally give them in terms of a timeline?

[00:41:12] **Sari Kimbell:** Yeah. It all depends on the product. Some products are definitely easier than others. But I generally say three months to a year. which is a long timeframe, but I would say generally if, if people could give

themselves six months, I mean, I have people that are like, I need to be up and running.

I got a farmer's market in four weeks and I'm like, okay, you know, we'll do everything we can, but there's so much bureaucracy. Right? Cause we're also dealing with government agencies, we're dealing with health departments. There are just so many things that we cannot foresee. I find the places that take the most time are generally around licensing. Getting the kitchen, like those things take a lot of time or if you're going to go the co-packer route, people think they can just get started with a co-packer in a couple of weeks. Like just find a co-packer. I mean, it's a six month process to get in with a co-packer and Do your test runs and your ingredients and I mean, all these things like for you to actually be having product made by them.

I mean, I would say minimum of six months, and then if you're doing branding, if you're doing things where people, you know, you're working with consultants like graphic designers or web designers, things like that, you know, there's always going to be back and forth and back and forth and revisions.

So those things always take longer. And then the big one, which I kind of mentioned it with the garlic. The big place that I find that people are really shocked that it takes so much time is around scaling up their recipe. it happened just last week. I had a client out here from Los Angeles and we were running her product, first time.

And she had had a food scientist create a recipe for her. it's like a gummy snack product. So it's not as simple as just like, you know, cookies or something like that, that we can make at home. So she had a food scientist create this recipe and it worked, like a small, really small scale.

And the food scientist promised her that all we had to do was, you know, multiply it by 12 or a hundred or whatever we were doing. And it would all work out perfectly well. I mean, the producer where we were having it made and myself both know better, but she insisted, right. We're going to, this is, we can just multiply it.

So we make this huge batch, we pour it into the molds and it's a total failure. Right. And it's like, I don't know why do not know what the laws of physics like, like what is happening, but I have never, ever. In my six years of doing this, found a recipe that just, you can just multiply it by 10 or whatever factor.

And it works out And then when you're going into a commercial kitchen, now we're dealing with giant equipment that behaves differently than your home equipment. We're dealing with commercial ovens, right. it's just like a totally different world. So if you can just prepare and say, I'm going to have some investment here where I'm going to throw product away, there's going to be testing of this.

It's not going to work. And then if it does then great like bonus, but don't expect it to work. And so I think that is an area of time that people, it really surprises people So each time you scale up, you're going to have to go through that process. So that's an area where I find people really underestimate their time.

[00:44:48] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, and that's one of the nice things about the cottage food realm is like, you can get started more easily. You don't have to do as much licensing, especially in certain states and you don't have to worry about the scaling thing at first. And I actually find a lot of people come to me and they're worried about the scaling thing from the start.

Like they haven't even sold a single in their life, but they are concerned that they're not gonna be able to handle the load when the orders roll in and when they have to scale it up. And how do I find a co-packer, and I usually just tell people like, Don't worry about that right now. Take it one step at a time.

Would you agree?

[00:45:21] **Sari Kimbell:** Yes, a hundred percent like deal with what you have in front of you. I mean, I think if I were going to do cottage food, which if I was going to do a package food business, I would totally start cottage food a hundred percent if I could, right. If I love the product, not everybody gets that luxury, but, I Would still want to, in my home kitchen scale up the recipe, as large as I can go, use commercial ingredients whenever possible.

So like buying in bulk, if you can, and sourcing from. More like restaurant distributors or you know, even Sam's or Costco or something like that, but just buying in bulk, buying larger scale ingredients, and getting really, really good. Get that recipe dialed in. I don't know if you tell people this, but I always say turn that recipe into a formula.

It needs to be in grams or ounces, including your liquids. So get away from teaspoons and tablespoons and cups and all of that. So that's what I would do as a cottage food producer, to be ready for the next level and like invest in tools

that will make the production more efficient. So as an example, like get the right size scoops for cookies so that they are always the same size all the time, right?

Things like that. Like just trying to make your production at home as efficient as possible and have those things really dialed in so that when you're ready to go to the next level, you're really prepared. It's going to be a little bit messy, but it's not going to be as bad as, or as challenging as when I work with people.

And they're like still using cups and tablespoons and pinches and things like that. So we have to go back and do all that foundational.

[00:47:09] **David Crabill:** Can you think of an example of where someone like jumped in feet first? You know, they didn't take the time to like formulate their recipe or whatever. And then they had major growing pains as their business became more successful.

[00:47:24] **Sari Kimbell:** there's definitely been cases where people go in a little too big, at the beginning, I guess it's usually when people are just like, yeah, my home recipe will scale and there shouldn't be a problem.

And, oh, it's coming from sea level to altitude. Like what, there's a problem with baking times. Right. So it's just kind of, I don't know if I call it ignorance necessarily, but it's, it's an unwillingness to kind of let there be issues and let this be part of the process that everything should just work.

Perfectly all at once. I definitely had somebody try like a beverage line, a canned beverage line, and I would say she, she would say that she jumped in too quickly for that she was prepared for the investment, but she wasn't prepared for what she needed to do on the backend.

So she had the product all canned, but now I need to go out and sell it. And she hadn't really worked through that piece yet. She ended up deciding to close down the business actually. I think she sold part of it, but she closed down the beverage line just because I think she got in a little over her head cause it was a fermented product.

And so there was some issues where the product kind of like a kombucha, like it always needs to be refrigerated and she wanted to be able to ship it and it didn't ship well, it was exploding. So like, these are just part of the process and part of the growing pains and the learning and the trial. But, you gotta have both the investment upfront and the willingness to make that investment, but then know that you gotta do all this work on the back end and solve a lot of problems.

So, that was a tough one. Cause it was a really, really great product. It just, she hadn't worked through what needed to happen to make it successful on the backend.

[00:49:17] **David Crabill:** That wraps up part one of my interview with Sari. Next week, I will publish part two, which you definitely won't want to miss.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this episode, you also won't want to miss Sari's workshop next week about increasing sales at farmer's markets. See the show notes for a link to sign up.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/59

And if you enjoyed this episode, please head over to apple podcasts and leave me a review. A review is the best way to support the show and will help others find it as well.

And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, 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.

Thanks for listening. And I'll see you next week for part two of this interview.