

Find Work That Fulfills You with Jenny Berg

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 Jenny Berg. But real quick, I wanted to check, have you created a website for your business yet? And if you have, are you paying for it?

A lot of entrepreneurs still think they need to spend money to get a good website, and that is simply not true anymore. I'm a really big fan of Square Online. That's what I use for my fudge business' website. And I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a totally free website in less than an hour and in case you think that free also means cheap.

It's actually quite the opposite. I think Square Online is hands down the very best website tool for most cottage food businesses, and it's even better than any of the other paid services out there. So if you wanna learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to forrager.com/website.

All right, so I have Jenny Berg on the show today. Jenny lives in Bend, Oregon and sells sourdough bread with her cottage food business, Crumb Sourdough Microbakery. Jenny first started baking sourdough bread back in 2020, shortly after the pandemic hit, and actually a lot of people started baking sourdough bread. Back then, it was like a sourdough renaissance. People were stuck at home and it became a very popular hobby, and many of those bakers, like Jenny started to sell their bread under the cottage food laws.

But not many bakers have turned their newfound hobby into such a successful business. When she finally started selling in 2021, her business took off and she hasn't looked back since. she quickly started selling out every single week and eventually had to invest in commercial equipment to ramp up her production.

She also has one of the fastest growing Instagram accounts I've ever seen. She has over 6,000 Instagram followers, 4,000 of which have come in the last four months alone. And yet, even though her Instagram account is 20 times larger than her Facebook account, Facebook is where she gets most of her new customers.

So we talk about why that is and so much more. Jenny shares what she's learned about baking and selling sourdough, how she grew her social accounts, not once but twice. How she's working to improve Oregon's restrictive cottage food law, and perhaps most importantly, how her cottage food business has finally given her a sense of fulfillment in her work. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Jenny. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:34] **Jenny Berg:** Hi, David. It's great to be here. Thank you for having me as a guest.

[00:02:38] **David Crabill:** So Jenny can you take me back to the beginning of this journey? How did it get started?

[00:02:44] **Jenny Berg:** Well my journey actually began during the covid lockdown. In 2020 and I have a friend and I saw her post on Facebook, this beautiful sourdough loaf and I don't know for how many years I've been kind of quietly wanting to pursue sourdough, but was so incredibly intimidated by the whole. Prospect and procedure of how you even go about baking sourdough bread. But seeing her post, I got a little envious and that if she can do it, I can do it. And we started messaging and she just really simplified things for me and she said, You can totally do this. And she gave me some pointers and from that point I ordered through the mail dried sourdough starter.

And this is from an archiver of sourdough in San Francisco. they advertise it as over a hundred year old sourdough starter. And I brought it to life, which was exciting. And I named her Zelda which you see throughout my menu.

She's kind of the queen bee of everything. And then I just started baking away. I became instantly hooked with the whole artisan process of sourdough. And I have to say that my first loaves were so ugly but they tasted good. And I just kept trying every weekend or anytime I had available, 'cause it is a process, it's a several day process.

So I, would just keep baking and baking and wanting to do better and better. And then ultimately we were, or I was giving away so much sourdough, as you can imagine, cause we can't eat it all here at the house. And people were giving me feedback that it was really good. So, Time went by and I actually, I don't even really know when or why, but I started to think, Well, gosh, what if I turned this into a money making operation?

And kind of backing up a little bit to the nineties, I must have a little bit of an entrepreneurial bug in me because in that time, I used to make jams and jellies

that I would sell at Saturday markets and craft shows and holiday bazars. And I rented a kitchen at the Masonic Temple . and I thought, Well, gosh, let's just, do this with sourdough and see where it goes.

So at that point I started to research. Laws for licensed kitchens in Oregon, and that's how I stumbled upon your website Forrager. And that opened a whole new avenue for me. I had no idea there were cottage food laws. I mean, since I was doing jams and jellies back in the day, there was nothing like this available.

So then I just started. Getting deeper and deeper into self-teaching. And when I felt like I got to a point where, yeah, I mean, I, I could feel good about selling this.

Then I made the announcement on social media that Crumb sourdough micro bakery would be opening for porch pickups, and this was in now July of 2021. And it just kind of grew from their family, friends, and coworkers were my first customers, and they were very excited for me. And it just really spread after that point.

[00:05:55] **David Crabill:** Yeah. And so what were you doing before this? I mean, you were working what was your career?

[00:06:02] **Jenny Berg:** Well, back then I was working at an appliance store in the warehouse doing a lot of computer work. And so when I was sent home during the height of the pandemic, I continued to do that on a part-time basis. And then after I, it was about six weeks I went back and so I was working Monday through Friday at that job and then doing the sourdough business on the weekends.

And I did that for approximately a whole year. And I was approaching burnout pretty quick, let me tell you. And then kind of a sad story. My, husband, Owns his own construction company and his very long time office manager who had been with him for 30 years. Uh, She passed away kind of unexpectedly at the beginning of January.

And we had to make a big decision. I put my notice in at the appliance uh, store, and I came home to work for my husband. And so I'm doing that now and baking the sourdough, which now I'm not doing seven days a week. I can really control my time. So I, am like a five day work week person again.

[00:07:11] **David Crabill:** I saw that you said that, making bread, it's the first time you really felt fulfilled in your work.

[00:07:19] **Jenny Berg:** Yes, it's true. You know, the appliance job was just paying bills and I have enjoyed. Other work I've done in the past, but nothing really felt to me like, we all feel like, well, we should have some purpose. You know, we're put here for a purpose or we have a gift for something. And I never could figure out what that was.

And it's a little disconcerting, I think, psychologically and emotionally to think, well, I, guess my jobs forever more are just gonna be paying the bills. And I'd be lucky if I enjoyed it. So when the sourdough came along, it just, I mean, everything about it just fulfilled me. You know, it's bringing in money for the family.

It's something I feel very joyful about. Bordering on obsession and passion at times. and I believe that this is my calling. it's a gift that I, have, it's very difficult to make sourdough and a lot of people try and they give up, and I just am in so much gratitude that, you know, I kind of like finally figured out this is definitely it for me.

[00:08:24] **David Crabill:** So, is it safe to say that if the pandemic had never happened, you would've never found this world of sourdough?

[00:08:33] **Jenny Berg:** I think that's very safe to say. I mean, there's a possibility that I still would've seen my friends' post, which is what started it all. but at that time, I may not have felt. Inspired or you know, 'cause during the pandemic, I think so many of us were just feeling lost and confused and lacking in joy and just there was a lot of worry.

So I think my mindset was definitely ripe for having this kind of dropped into my lap.

[00:09:04] **David Crabill:** Well, yeah, I mean, there was like, I would say a sourdough renaissance, right? During the pandemic, it seemed like almost everyone was starting to make sourdough. but very few of them continued to make it and actually turned it into a real substantial business like you have. uh, we'll get into that now with your starter, You know, I know you call her Zelda and she is very much a, like a part of your business. Yeah. I see her name all over the place. But was that like an intentional thing for you to like try to incorporate your starter, like as an important marketing piece or did that just kind of happen.

[00:09:42] **Jenny Berg:** Well, I knew after I kind of, you know, resurrected her from dried condition it's a living thing really. And I had to give her a personality

and a name, and she just embodied female to me. I don't know why. So when I did come around to starting the business, I did consider calling my business Zelda.

But then I thought I would get so many questions like, Who's Zelda? what's the story? And I didn't wanna have to constantly be explaining, Well, it's my starter, But I didn't want to totally ignore her because without Zelda, I don't have sourdough bread. so I, just decided I would name a lot of my menu items after her, and she's prominently written about on my website.

So I don't know, it's just kind of been a, a fun way to keep honoring her. And then the fact that I was able to just not kill her, which can happen, a lot of people's uh, struggle with their starters.

[00:10:40] **David Crabill:** Certainly it's memorable and it adds element of uniqueness to your business. So if we go back to 2020, you're trying to learn how to do sourdough. You're making a lot of bread, you're giving a lot of bread away, but how were you learning?

I know you got started with this friend, but I mean, were you learning from other bakers? Were you finding information on the internet? How were you figuring it out?

[00:11:04] **Jenny Berg:** Definitely I am completely self-taught, so I found prominent sourdough bakers on Instagram and on the internet and on Facebook, and I, just followed as many as I could, and many of these people share a lot of their techniques or they're willing to. Communicate with you in a direct or private message, which is so wonderful about the baking community.

I've just found everybody's willing to share what they know within reason, you know, or some people are very busy and I never want to intrude on someone's time, but in the beginning, people were very generous with giving me tips behind the scenes. And then I bought books. I have many sourdough books by some of the masters

I would make up recipes, see what worked, what didn't. And then not being afraid to make mistake. Because mistakes are going to happen. And again, that's another great learning tool. and even with now that I have customers, I still kind of push myself. And if I make a mistake, I'm not gonna pretend that I, didn't notice.

fortunately I have found that my, customers are very gracious and I always make it up to them in some way.

They get free bread down the road. But I, I just think me, self teaching, doing it and making mistakes has been the greatest teacher of all.

[00:12:24] **David Crabill:** What are some of the people that you were following? Are there ones that you would recommend, books that you would recommend?

[00:12:32] **Jenny Berg:** Well, my first book was by Ken Forkish, Flour Water Salt Yeast. I think I got the order of that correctly. of course then Tartine by Chad Robertson is another book that I just absorbed. Online there is the Perfect Loaf. his actual personal name, I'm escaping, but he's, on social media's on Instagram.

He's on the internet. He does a lot of techniques and recipes and even does a lot of equipment review, which really was a tremendous help to me. In purchasing my commercial mixer and I have an electric brick oven. And you know, all of that can be really intimidating. There's, a lot to choose from out there.

[00:13:16] **David Crabill:** So in terms of equipment, you got this electric brick oven and you've got a commercial mixer. Did you invest in those before you started selling?

[00:13:26] **Jenny Berg:** No, I did not. for about the first year, maybe just slightly under, I used my, countertop or my standing mixer to mix all of the dough, which was very time consuming because I could only do up to three batches at a time. And I have two mixers, so it helped a little bit. And then I literally slugged heavy cast iron Dutch ovens during that time as well.

In the beginning I was only making about eight to nine loaves a week, all in one day, 'cause I have my business is porch pickup.. And so I bake every Friday and the customers come get the bread on Friday. So it was slow going. I mean, that oven of mine was running almost all day and until I got the bread out on the porch.

But it wasn't until the beginning of this year that I, bought the electric brick oven and the commercial mixer and those, are game changers for me.

[00:14:21] **David Crabill:** So what, kind of oven did you buy?

[00:14:23] **Jenny Berg:** I have a Rofco B 40.

when I ordered it, it was on back order for months, so I had to wait until I didn't get it actually until February or March of this year. And I had ordered it in about November prior to that. And they're still on back order right now. I'm planning to get a second brick oven, not from Rofco. There's another company, I believe they're an Irvine called Simply Bread and American Made, and they're kind of new on the market, and I've been following some people on Instagram that just got one, like, all you need she just got the Simply Bread.

Oven and she is loving it. So that's probably gonna be my next, investment. But I wanna say that Rofco was right around \$2,000 to \$3,000.

[00:15:13] **David Crabill:** So you were baking in Dutch ovens for like a year you drummed up this business and I know you started selling like almost a year after you started trying out sourdough. Did you just take a year before you felt like you were comfortable with it or was it 'cause you just didn't know that it was even legal to sell your homemade bread?

[00:15:35] **Jenny Berg:** No, I really did all of my research on that prior to selling. I had, like I mentioned, I had no idea that there were cottage food laws, so I wanted to make sure I understood all of that before I started selling.

And, having the pets was a real concern for me. and then I learned it's totally legal as long as they're not in the kitchen with me while I'm, baking. Which of course does not happen in my house.

So I think the cottage food operation is such a great avenue for a lot of people. I, I think the pandemic changed a lot of the way businesses do business and I think it's a wonderful thing that these laws are allowing people who can't afford a commercial space or don't want even to pay, for the license.

a kitchen license, which can be too expensive for them. And it just allows people to jump right in and run a business without a lot of regulation. So there's definitely an honor system. I feel like with my customers. they all know my situation because I, I have to disclaim on my packaging per Oregon law, that this item is homemade and not prepared in an inspected facility. But I'm still selling out every week. there's just that level of transparency that I think is refreshing for people anymore of where their food is coming from in addition to what is in it and who's making it.

[00:16:57] **David Crabill:** So you figured out all the legal requirements and then you decided to start selling and how did you put yourself out there? Did you just announce it on Instagram?

[00:17:06] **Jenny Berg:** Actually, I announced it on Facebook, my personal Facebook first. I had been posting pictures probably of my bread and, my scoring designs and whatnot. and then I just announced it on Facebook that I was opening up for my first porch pickups in July and I already had my website ready.

So I did, do that prior, I had all my ducks in a row cause I wanted to be organized when the orders came in. I did invest a little more money in my website because I, got some additional tools and some extra features. You know, everything's always extra if you want to do this, this, or this.

what's kind of not great in Oregon right now is that in our state, we can't engage in e-commerce. I can't have a shopping cart on my website. so I had to set up a unique way of receiving orders so I was all prepared for that. Before I made the announcement and people were just so excited for me, I think something I just want other people to know is don't be shy about promoting yourself or thinking what other people are gonna think about you for doing that.

Just get out of your own way toot your own horn. Be really excited about what you're about to do, and you'll get people that will just wanna support you a hundred percent.

[00:18:20] **David Crabill:** when you put yourself out there, you actually got someone to order, What was that first sale like?

[00:18:27] **Jenny Berg:** That was really exciting and again, back at that time, I think I was only doing like eight to nine loaves and I thought that was so many and so I got them all put out on the front porch and I really took a lot of care with my packaging. I, I wanted immediately to have a professional. Looking brand in a presence like, this is not my hobby folks, this is my business now.

And so put the bread out and then I can remember my husband and I peering out the window as my first customers were coming to pick up their bread. And we were just giggling. And I was so excited to see customers going out of their way, coming to my house to pick up something that I made.

Yeah, and I kept wanting to ask everybody as soon as they got their bread, Hey, do you mind cutting it open? I really wanna see what the crumb looks like,. And

it was so hard letting your bread go and not being able to see what it looks like on the inside. Because if you're a sourdough baker, the crumb, you know, the pattern of the holes and all of that on the inside is, is a big deal.

But I, got a lot of really great feedback. I had one customer who was very upfront with me, who told me it was really dense, so I had to really figure out what was wrong there.

And, made her another loaf for free. again, it's not being afraid to make a mistake or, somebody's gonna be disappointed sometime along the way. But yeah, it was, just so exciting. Overall, it was very successful. Those first, you know, months being open.

[00:19:56] **David Crabill:** So, yeah, I mean, I see your website and your logo. Everything's. nicely designed. So you invested in that kind of brand and I, assume, paid for a designer before you even started selling anything.

[00:20:10] **Jenny Berg:** Yes, that's correct. I. came up with a name. I pulled friends on Facebook. I gave them a list of potential business names. So I, you know, I got, my friends and family involved in the process cause I cared about what they thought cause I'm not a brand expert. and that was very helpful.

And then I did reach out to a graphic designer who came up with the logo. And then she also did all of my social media elements too. and I worked with fiverr.com and found a gal whose style, she does hand drawn logos. I really liked her style and, she was amazing to work with.

[00:20:48] **David Crabill:** So you started out selling with porch pickups. Is that all you've done? have you sold your bread anywhere else over the last year and a half?

[00:21:00] **Jenny Berg:** No, I have not. And again, Oregon, as you know, is very restrictive and we're hoping to change all of that. But nope, it's just the porch pickups. I really don't want to do deliveries. That would be another option. and I have not done roadside stands. I haven't done farmer's markets.

I did all of that in the nineties with the jams and jellies, and I just didn't feel like doing that. And especially that first year when I was working Monday through Friday at one job and then baking on the weekends, the last thing I wanted to do was drive around for a couple hours delivering. So the porch pickups have worked really, really well for me.

[00:21:39] **David Crabill:** Well, did you even need any extra business? Like you could go out and sell to Farmer's Market and drum it more business, but it sounds like you, were maxed out.

[00:21:48] **Jenny Berg:** I am totally maxed out right now. and that's changing in the future as well. so I started at about eight loaves a week, and now I'm up to 30 every Friday. And I could do more, I could probably double that. My limitations right now are space, I need another refrigerator. extra oven I would need to make sure I get all the baking done by the time customers are coming.

So I could definitely, I know I could double it. But for me right now, it's just a space issue.

[00:22:21] **David Crabill:** And it looks like you're in the processability, a new home. So that's that like kind of the plan.

[00:22:26] **Jenny Berg:** It is, yes, so my husband is, is a builder and the kitchen that we're designing is going to be large enough and be able to accommodate all of my equipment. So I'm really, really excited about that. the drawback is, will be about half an hour outside of Bend. And so I don't think a lot of my customers are gonna wanna drive an hour to come get it. So I am hoping with Oregon next year if we can get some changes in the law going that I can do wholesale I can really operate like a regular. retail business and not be limited in that area.

So I'll have to figure out something else. I'll, I'm working with other businesses in the area where I could have my bread. We have some farmer's markets that are indoors that are five days a week and work on consignment. there is options, but that is kind of the drawback. I'll have a beautiful home kitchen bakery for this, but I'm gonna be a little ways out of town now.

[00:23:26] **David Crabill:** Yeah, no, I, I know you've been very active in wanting to change the law and Oregon's one of the only states that doesn't allow online sales for their basic cottage food laws. So I know you made an effort this year. You're looking ahead to next year. I think you're gonna be one of the big reasons why it's gonna probably change in the near future. what have you done to try to get this law changed?

[00:23:51] **Jenny Berg:** I have to thank you David, because you sent an email out last year announcing California's new laws, you were very, very forthcoming in how that happened and what agencies were involved in getting it

done. I remember when I first started doing this, I was thinking, Wow. I don't like the limits that we have.

And I'm saying to my husband, I, How do you even go about getting a bill introduced into legislation or how do you change the law? I mean, I'm not, Poly sci in high school was a long time ago, so I don't remember all the procedures. and then your email came in. It was the perfect timing. I reached out to those agencies, you know, the Institute for Justice and then you had the Cook Alliance.

And I sent emails to both of them and they both responded and it just has gone from there. They, I'm working now exclusively with the Institute for Justice and they have a team and they are really helping me learn what I need to be doing and who I need to be gathering to lock arms. You know, we've got a whole.

Group of Oregon Cottage Food Bakers, were ready to go and be the activists or go testify when this is introduced and up for vote. so we're ready to go. But I, really couldn't do it without the Institute for Justice's help. They've been amazing to work with, so it's interesting to see how this whole process is evolving, but we really want to change most of what's currently the law in Oregon right now.

It's very limiting.

[00:25:24] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, I, also. Would have not tried to start a bill last year in California if it weren't for the Institute for Justice, being on board to help out. So they're great. And I know that you tried to run a bill through the legislature this year. It didn't work out. what kind of went wrong there?

[00:25:44] **Jenny Berg:** Well, we had just missed the deadline there were many, many of us who sent emails out to our legislatures in office and we got a lot of response back they were supportive at saying, Well, it's too late for this year.

So we ultimately did get. a senator, Senator Tim Canop stepped up and said he would sponsor our bill, but it's got to wait now till 2023.

[00:26:07] **David Crabill:** Yeah. Well, if there's one thing I've learned with legislation, you have to be patient. And like I tell people it's gonna take time. Sometimes it takes years but kudos to you for sticking with it. And I have feeling that it'll probably be changed next year as you and the Institute for Justice and others work on it.

So going back to your business you know, you started not quite a year and a half ago, started to sell Did you start to sell out every weekend? Those first few weekends? Like you only had nine loaves available? Right.

[00:26:39] **Jenny Berg:** Yes, it's rare if I'm not sold out and it has happened. Recently, but in the beginning, yeah, I sold out quite a lot. and one unique thing that happened very early on that really jump started the business was I had a customer who heard about me through word of mouth. So now things were starting to go beyond my friends and family.

It was turning into Instagram and Facebook are my biggest areas where I get new customers. And then word of mouth. So the gal who've heard about me through word of mouth bought bread ironically, she's the one that told me, the first one she bought for me was really dense. I just wanted to crawl under a rock at a point.

so I baked her another one and it was so, she loved it so much that she posted pictures of it in two foodie Facebook groups for Bend. Bend is a very foodie community. So these are well-populated groups, and she tagged me and I saw it come in and the orders that night, David came pouring in. And that was really the impetus for the next level of growth for my business.

I hated the thought of turning anybody away, so I said, Well, I'm just gonna have to bake more. so that's how I gradually, kept increasing my output until I'm where I am right now.

[00:27:59] **David Crabill:** So I imagine in the early, months of your business, it was just kind of exciting. Things were new, things were growing, expanding rapidly. Did it ever kind of settle down at some point?

[00:28:13] **Jenny Berg:** No. It kept going and I would be sold out. the whole month, maybe within the first week of the month. lately though, like I alluded to, I have not been selling out and I know that there's different reasons for that. I think what's going on over in Ukraine is finally catching up with us, with the whole wheat industry.

Flour prices are rising, And then with inflation, I think it's finally hitting people in the pocketbook now more than it was early on. So I'm finding that I'm not selling out. I've had a couple of weeks now where I haven't, but then like last week I was sold out. So I'm not worried.

I'm still on the trajectory of growing, but I just have to accept right now that people's, Discretionary spending is not as much, They don't have as much freedom with that right now.

[00:29:03] **David Crabill:** Yeah. And that, that raised an important point is that it looks like you probably from the beginning went with all organic everything. That's not cheap

[00:29:13] **Jenny Berg:** No,,

[00:29:14] **David Crabill:** and then also you have like a very special flour that you buy and everything. So you can talk a little bit about the decision making process to go a real high end route?

[00:29:25] **Jenny Berg:** Yeah. I knew early on that I wanted to be organic because that's how I live personally. I support that whole sector, I knew my price point was going to be higher as a result, I don't know that every community could support that. Bend is really unique. Like I say, it's very foodie here and they do pay more for handcrafted food, or that's not processed or fast or chemical laden people are really into their food here.

So the cost of living here is, rather high as well. so I do keep track of all of my, food costs. I have a spreadsheet, so I know what my margins are and I have not had to raise my prices at all since I started, even though my prices have gone up slightly. I, I have a wonderful margin, so I buy as much as I can in bulk.

And here's a neat little tip too. I have. Friend here, she's a fellow sourdough baker. She and I met because we're both bakers. We met on Instagram. some would say, Well, she's kind of my competition, but she's really not. We've really created an alliance and we use the same flour and we go in on a distributor who will normally a 50 pound bag coming from Utah would be, that was a lot of money in UPS delivery fees.

So we go in together, we hit the minimum amount that is required to order. The truck comes over, it gets delivered to a restaurant here in town, and we go over and pick up our flour from the restaurant. So it's really great if you can connect with other bakers in your community and save on costs like that,

[00:31:01] **David Crabill:** so this is interesting. So you're, getting your flour from a distributor, I guess in 50 pound batches. And they're backing up a truck to deliver it. Right? So they need a loading dock probably.

[00:31:15] **Jenny Berg:** Yes.

[00:31:15] **David Crabill:** so you're working with the restaurant to get it and then collaborating with another baker to make it affordable.

that's a really unique solution to some of the limitations of having home business. So where do you get your flour from?

[00:31:31] **Jenny Berg:** I researched so many flours it got so many samples And I finally settled on central milling out of Utah. I tested different blends.

They don't blend it for you, but I ordered different kinds and I blended my own. It's now my proprietary flour blend. It's the base of, most all of my sourdough varieties.

Also for people that are buying huge, like 50 pound bags of flour like I am

I like to take all my flour out of the bags and so I can scoop out my flour. And I have found that you can buy 50 pound dog food tubs on casters at. [chewy.com](https://www.chewy.com). and it's a lot less expensive than the restaurant supply stores and their food grade.

[00:32:16] **David Crabill:** So, yeah, your bread's definitely, you're not given it away,, it is well priced. So can you talk a little bit about what you are charging currently for your bread?

[00:32:27] **Jenny Berg:** So my basic, the Zelda original is \$12. What you get is over a pound of bread. then from there, Breads that have inclusions in them, like my jalapeno cheddar, roasted garlic and rosemary chocolate chip. Those all go for \$14. And then I have a real high end bread that it's a recipe that I created all by myself and was very proud of it.

She's called Zelda after hours and that has rum soaked cherries. And we're talking top shelf rum and there's cardamom in it and then chocolate chips.

And I have a lot of customers for \$18 buying that and loving it.

[00:33:12] **David Crabill:** yeah. Can you share a little bit, you shared a few of your flavors there. What are some of the other flavors that you have?

[00:33:19] **Jenny Berg:** Those are my standard flavors. Every month though, I offer a seasonal specialty and I look, you know, if it's like strawberry season or this month, a lot of corn is being harvested. So I will come up with every month, and it's usually \$14 for the specialty. Sometimes it's \$16, depending on the ingredients, so this month I called it the carnivore and I sourced local sweet corn, organic sweet corn, and then stone ground corn meal locally, and it's kind of a double corn sourdough.

I've done. Strawberry and balsamic and black pepper sourdough before as a seasonal specialty. I've done matcha and chocolate chip. I did that one in March for the green color. Next month I'm doing a pumpkin spiced sourdough and the cute little pumpkin shapes that you see so many sourdough bakers making, and that will be \$16.

So that's been a really helpful thing for my business is, keeping it fresh and exciting for your customers because even I get bored baking the same old thing. So it keeps me fresh and excited. It keeps my customers excited and I'm communicating with them more often because I'm announcing what the specialty will be.

So I'm staying at the forefront of their purchasing minds. I'm keeping them excited and invariably following an email announcing the specialty. I. A lot of orders coming in.

So, be sure to get your customers emails. I don't accept any orders through. DM or private messages, it all has to go through my order form so that my website will capture all of my customer's information.

So it's very easy for me to do an email marketing campaign from that.

[00:35:06] **David Crabill:** Would you say that the, is a seasonal or specialty bread the best seller in each month? Or what? What are your top sellers?

[00:35:15] **Jenny Berg:** Top sellers of the main loaves I offer are the roasted garlic and rosemary. Then it would be the jalapeno and cheddar chocolate chips, a big deal. But I think of the seasonal specialties. I'm trying to think back what would be a really popular one. The, the strawberry balsamic vinegar and black pepper was probably the most popular.

[00:35:38] **David Crabill:** So it's surprising, I mean, the original, your just basic Loaf is not one of your best sellers,

[00:35:44] **Jenny Berg:** Oh, well, yes. I'm sorry that is probably my best seller because a new customer will. Kind of be playing it safe and just ordering that to see if they even like my bread. So yeah. How could I forget about Zelda

[00:35:59] **David Crabill:** And then you also have a subscription service. Can you explain that?

[00:36:04] **Jenny Berg:** Yes. So this is another great tip that Bakers should consider. Again, it's keeping it fresh for customers, and it's money saving. I offer monthly subscriptions. So each month a customer can sign up for the, every week of the month, whatever they want. I limit it to two loaves a week, and you save a dollar off each loaf, and it's got to be every week of the month.

And I require payment on any order. I require full payment within 24 hours to fully reserve your spot. So I will have people pay for that whole month upfront within 24 hours. then they're guaranteed bread every month. They don't have to run to the computer, place the order through my clunky, what, you know, order form because of the whole can't do eCommerce thing.

So it's time saving for them. And then they don't have to worry about running out of bread because I do sell out. Typically,

[00:36:57] **David Crabill:** And how do people typically pay you?

[00:37:00] **Jenny Berg:** Venmo is the most popular than PayPal and I do take cash in exact change. And again, it's got to be delivered to me within 24 hours.

[00:37:12] **David Crabill:** Would you say most of your customers are subscribers? what's the split?

[00:37:18] **Jenny Berg:** In the beginning I had a lot of subscribers, but no, that's not the majority, surprisingly. And during the summer months, people are just gone too much and they, they're not here to get bread. So that has tapered off. But it's starting to pick back up again. So, no, I still get customers that order every week or maybe two to three out of the four to five weeks every month.

And again, it's because they're not here in town or they're traveling or what have you.

[00:37:47] **David Crabill:** I noticed at the bottom of your order form, you say, how did you hear about me that you have that question. What is the most common answer to that question?

[00:37:55] **Jenny Berg:** The most common answer is Facebook. Followed by Instagram.

[00:37:59] **David Crabill:** really surprising to me. So you have like over 300 followers on your Facebook page. You have over 6,000 followers on your Instagram feed.

[00:38:11] **Jenny Berg:** Yes.

[00:38:12] **David Crabill:** So can you explain why, like, I would've expected, like by far the majority of people to be coming from Instagram.

[00:38:20] **Jenny Berg:** Right. I think the Facebook is from the groups. since that one customer posted, I've had other customers now post in both of those groups. and then you can do searches in groups. And I think, if they're really looking for something, they'll type in sourdough.

In the group, and then everybody who's commented on me and every other sourdough baker in town will come up in that group. So that's the only thing I can think because yeah, Instagram is, I definitely have more followers, but everything posts automatically to Facebook.

[00:38:51] **David Crabill:** Okay, so it's maybe not coming from your like Facebook page, but it's just coming from these other local groups that people are finding.

[00:38:59] **Jenny Berg:** Yeah, I would say probably not from my page. Yeah. And there could be people that privately post about me then I never see, that they're doing that.

[00:39:08] **David Crabill:** Well, we have to talk about Instagram cause I mean, it's just been an incredible increase in your follower account. And I'm not sure exactly how you've done it, but I think less than a year ago from what I can see had under 800 followers and in the past four months, you've added 4,000 followers.

it's crazy. What are you doing make this happen? this is insane.

[00:39:35] **Jenny Berg:** Prior to September 11th of last year, I was on my way to 2000 followers on Instagram, and I woke up on. Nine 11 and I had all kinds of messages from Facebook that I had violated community standards, and it was, it must have been something very egregious.

And within hours all of my accounts were taken down. This is over a decade on Facebook and lots of stuff going on on Instagram. I don't know to this day what happened, but I had been hacked and then our checking accounts started getting hacked. I was so despondent, I had to rebuild everything. so the Instagram you're seeing now is not even the original one, but I got a lot of support from the community when I, you know, made my announcement of what had happened.

I had so many people sharing my plate and I got a lot of followers immediately, again, re followers. But recently I created a reel on Instagram. Just kind of by the seat of my pants. It must have been the perfect timing and the perfect duration for a reel because that thing went viral and it's not even that great of a reel.

I mean, I don't know what it was, but it took off. And I think on that reel, I have probably a hundred thousand or more views on it. And then 4,000 loves on it. And it was at that point that, I mean, my follower numbers just started clicking, by like a hundred every day or so. So that's the only thing I can attribute to sudden.

[00:41:07] **David Crabill:** You maybe got a bit lucky. I mean, is that what you're basically saying?

[00:41:11] **Jenny Berg:** I think so. I don't know if it got featured somewhere, but it's nothing I'm doing, you know, like artificially to grow. it was just kind of a crack up that this one reel was so incredibly popular.

That's when the growth started and it's been great. And so now I'm, you know, getting things where I can monetize and I don't know anything about all of that, but it's been kind of exciting to watch it grow and. Feel like I've got a presence and I get a lot of interaction on my post. So to me, I know I've heard other people say they don't post that much on Instagram, but that's where my bread and butter is coming from.

I'm gonna be a regular, you know, and I want content that's interesting for people too. Entertaining, Interesting. Or just something pretty,

[00:41:55] **David Crabill:** Well, so this is interesting. I mean, you had this reel that just took off and has continued to be really popular. Your follower accounts are going through the roof. How has that actually affected your business or has it affected your business Much.

[00:42:11] **Jenny Berg:** Oh, I'm not sure it's affected me anymore than previously because I was always selling out. But now lately there's been a couple of weeks where I'm not sold out. So I can't say that, the 6,000 followers all of a sudden now I've got like a waiting list or anything.

But I think, to be consistent and I'm still gonna be consistent, I know it's, it's gonna go through this cycle. I am getting a lot more interaction and private messages on social media. So, I mean, I think I'm more on the radar screen. I don't know if people are necessarily in that moment placing orders, but they're aware of me now, so I think I'll be seeing the fruits of that down the.

[00:42:51] **David Crabill:** Have you gotten more people reaching out to you like media or just people who are wanting to learn from you on Instagram.

[00:43:01] **Jenny Berg:** Yeah, both. I get a lot of inquiries from people just starting out. and I help them, I give them links. I'm, I always include your link cause I say, This is where I started and this is where you need to be if you're gonna do cottage food operations. So I do a lot of that. And interestingly, last year I got a call from one of the local news stations here in town, TV news, and a reporter wanted to come out and she saw my pumpkin shaped sourdough loaves and wanted to come do a fun little report.

On me. And so she came over on a Sunday when I was baking and she filmed me and it was this fun little, interest story on the news. And, again, so orders started pouring in after that. And a lot of my returning customers are from that news story. And I still will occasionally get, How did you hear about me?

They'll choose the news story.

[00:43:56] **David Crabill:** All right, so maybe you got a little bit lucky with the reel, but. you had been approaching 2000 followers on Instagram you know, just over a year ago, and then you rebuilt it. So you know, you've worked it up to, I guess, over 2000 subscribers before this crazy real, So clearly you're doing something right.

So what are some of the techniques you've used to build your Instagram account?

[00:44:18] **Jenny Berg:** Well, again, I think being consistent is important. You want to stay present as people are, going through their feed. you go vacant, Or dead air on Instagram, think you lose traction. So being consistent, taking high

quality photos is key. Food can be very tricky to photograph, and I do everything on my iPhone, and the videos I do are not always perfect.

The lighting may be poor because I, tend to turn out all my lights and use natural light whenever I can. I just think being genuine, having attractive photos and offering something of value in addition to just the pretty picture. So offering a tip. I mean, I've got followers who are other bakers wanting to grow their business or start a business.

So I, I need to cater to them I give them little inside peaks at my operation or, you know, The ugly stuff too. I mean, not everything is pretty. I, I will post like, the worst experiences that I have in the bakery just to encourage other people. It's okay. even when you, you know, you get to a place where you're a little more successful, you're still gonna, booger out sometimes on something.

So I do that and make it funny. I don't take it too seriously. And that's a good way to deal with your failures, to just kind of laugh at it, brush it off. And then for my, customers, who are buying from me or I want to buy from me, I try to just make their mouths water with whatever it is I'm writing or posting.

and that seems to be liked by a lot of people as well.

[00:45:54] **David Crabill:** So can you talk a little bit about the process that you go through to make your bread?

[00:46:01] **Jenny Berg:** Sure. So, I bake Fridays. So that means that the process for me starts Wednesday. my ordering cutoff for Fridays is Tuesday. And that way I know how many customers I have. So Wednesday is when I build up my starter quantity. And that was a real conundrum for me getting going is how do you build up this massive amount of starter or levain to bake 15 loaves of bread?

I mean, my goodness, how much flour am I gonna have to go through on this? And I developed a system that works for me, which I only maintain and feed about 30 grams of starter throughout the week. Come Tuesday, I start building it up and come Wednesday. Now I know I have, let's say 30 customers for Friday.

I know I'm gonna build up my starter too. I need about six quarts of levain and I will do what's called a one to five to five ratio on Wednesday uh, where it's one part starter to five parts water to five parts flour. so then that gets all bubbly. By Wednesday, I put it in the refrigerator to what's called retard it to stop it from

growing. And I need to measure out all my flour. Cause now I know how many customers I have, how much flour I need to, to weigh out.

And then Thursday morning, I will start making the dough. So I pull the, the leban out, I get my mixer going. I start putting all my different varieties in the mixer and going. And, it cold retards in the refrigerator Thursday night in their proofing baskets.

And what that will do that now makes the acidic acid produce, which will give it that traditional more sour flavor than if you were to not do that process. But that's like really, I think, a baker's personal preference, whether they want to do the cold retard or not. I know a lot of bakers don't do that.

And I affectionately call Thursdays dough day. It is like manic and it's messy. It's frustrating at times cause you're trying to nail your fermentation.

If you mess that up, your bread's gonna not do what it's supposed to do. It can be pretty stressful. And then Fridays are my favorite day. Wake up bright and early. I fire up the oven and I start baking away. And I know within the first batch if I've nailed it or not. if they're not good in the first batch, I'm not very happy for the remaining bakes.

But it's mostly stuff that I would notice anymore. Not that a customer would notice, so yes, that the whole process for me starts Wednesday.

[00:48:42] **David Crabill:** When I think of making sourdough, I mean, I haven't made it myself, but it seems like it's like quite a workout, right?

[00:48:49] **Jenny Berg:** It is, yes., I'm stretching, unfolding over 30 pounds of dough on day, so, The reason I do not hand mix my dough, and I know a lot of, I admire bakers who do, if they've got this quantity and they're hand mixing, and that is very traditional. my first batch that I tried hand mixing, I strained a muscle in my arm, put me out of commission.

So for me, it's not an option. It's not just out of convenience that I use the commercial mixer, but yeah, you, have to be careful if you're hand mixing that quantity of dough and stretching and folding, you can injure yourself.

[00:49:26] **David Crabill:** Can you explain a little bit of the difference between your sourdough bread and what you can buy at the store?

[00:49:34] **Jenny Berg:** Oh, absolutely. There's such a big difference. there's a term out there called sour faux as in fake. Much of commercial sourdough bread does not go through the process that I just described. It's like bread with vinegar added. There's no care taken to bulk for men. It's pretty artificially flavored.

There's stabilizers added to the bread, and when you look at the label of ingredients, you'll immediately see a difference between a plain commercial sourdough and an artisan sourdough will just be water, flour, salt, and wild yeast. And that's it. that's all it should be. So people who buy commercially oftentimes well I've got a lot of, not a lot of, I've got several customers who have gluten intolerances and they are unable to eat any bread, any commercial bread, but they can eat my bread.

They can eat not just my bread, but any authentic sourdough bread because of the enzymes from the fermentation in there, help with digestion. And it's just very gut healthy to eat authentic sourdough bread. And people who think they can never eat bread again, really should look into buying and finding somebody to buy authentic sourdough bread because they can enjoy bread.

I have one customer who told me her four year old daughter, Who has never eaten bread in her whole life because of eczema reactions, was able to eat my bread with no issue and actually loves it. So it's very thrilling when I hear that.

[00:51:06] **David Crabill:** as you're making the bread, As you allude to like, sometimes things don't go according to plan. Have there been any failures or, or things you've tried that just haven't worked out that stick in your mind?

[00:51:21] **Jenny Berg:** Yes,, The one loaf for I mentioned to you was probably my most popular seasonal, the strawberry of balsamic vinegar and black pepper. The very last week of that month, I think this was in May, I offered it, which is strawberry season. I was really confident cause it had been going well all month. I had probably eight to 10 of these ordered.

I put them in the oven, in the brick oven and I knew something right away was wrong. They flattened out to a Frisbee and they were burned on the bottom. So they were either over fermented, under fermented. I didn't shape them well. I mean it could be a myriad of things that affected the gluten structure of this batch.

And I was so crestfallen I could cry. And that was the hard call where I had to call all of my customers that morning and tell them, Your bread is terrible. It just, it's flat. It's, I don't know what happened. You are welcome to come get it.

It's probably still delicious cause that's the thing with sourdough, it can look really ugly, but it's nine times out of 10 gonna taste still really good.

I said, You're welcome to come get it. You will have a free loaf. You have a credit waiting for you when you order again. Well, sure enough, all of the customers. Not one was angry with me on the phone, which I'm so thankful for. They all came and picked it up and only one customer said she'll take the credit.

All of the other ones said it was so delicious that they didn't need to have a standing credit for another loaf. And that just warmed my heart. But I did post on Instagram that morning and I posted a picture of it how horrified I was. So that was the biggest flop of involving multiple customers.

[00:53:03] **David Crabill:** Well, it's one thing to have a failure and you know, obviously you have to deal with customers and fix whatever problem, but it's another to actually post your failures publicly online. Was that difficult for you at all?

[00:53:20] **Jenny Berg:** No, because I am very transparent person. So I feel better when I just come out with it uh, and not try to pretend like I'm not noticing that something's wrong. There's a temptation, like when something's borderline for me and it's not up to my standards, there's a temptation for me to just say, Oh, I, that, that customer won't even notice that, but I can't do that.

So it's better for me to announce it. And then what's really wonderful that happens is so many other bakers post, Oh, been there, done that. We all go through it. so it's reassuring to know you're not the only one that this happens to, and it's, so, it's just kind of like that community again. Uh, The baking community and the bread community in particular is just so supportive.

[00:54:10] **David Crabill:** Well, one thing that's really interesting about your business even amongst sourdough bakers, is that you only sell pools. Like you just do one thing, and of course you have your different inclusions, you have your different flavors. Sometimes you, do creative things with the shape, but for the most part, like that's all you're selling.

You're just selling one type of bread. And is that intentional? Have you tried doing anything else? Selling other types of sourdough breads?

[00:54:38] **Jenny Berg:** Yes, actually my plan was I take two breaks every year because burnout is common as you probably know yourself. So I intentionally take July and January's off, and it's during those months that I have goals of,

like, for instance, I want to learn how to make baguettes, and I was going to do that in July.

But then, We were camping every weekend, and instead, because we didn't have a, terrible fire season this year in Oregon. So we, we gotta get out and camp. So that did not happen. But my goal is, yes, I would like to expand to baguettes is my next step. There are many things you can make with sourdough. I mean, pretzels, which I've made for fun before.

Bagels I've made for fun before. You can even make products using your sourdough starter, discard like crackers and granola. So there are a lot of things that I envision that I can do, but it's probably not going to happen until my husband retires and I'm not working for him anymore. And I can do this full time and bake more than one day a week.

[00:55:50] **David Crabill:** you're doing the same thing every week. So what keeps you going and why are you so passionate about this business and why do you love baking so much?

[00:56:00] **Jenny Berg:** Yes, it can get monotonous. again, I have to reflect back on my, my humble beginnings and looking out the window and seeing that first customer come to the porch and just how giddy I felt about that. And just when I hear feedback from customers, I get that quite often. That they say my bread is as every bit as good as San Francisco sourdough.

I mean, I feel like, okay, I must have reached like the big time to get that kind of response. I feel like I. I hit a place where, yeah, I can really call myself a sourdough baker. I'm not faking it anymore.

[00:56:36] **David Crabill:** So looking ahead are you planning on going full time with this and like what's your vision or plan for the future?

[00:56:46] **Jenny Berg:** Yes, my plan and vision are I do want to go full time. I would love to bake at minimum twice a week. I don't know, I still want to have my weekends available as me time. I don't know if it's even physically possible with sourdough to bake more than twice a week, given the preparation involved with each, time.

But my husband will probably be retiring in a few years. We'll be in that new home with, the big kitchen. And so the plan is, yes, this will be our main source of income,

And he's ready to. Be my delivery guy or. He can't wait. He's, he loves his job, but he just envisions helping me being very therapeutic after 30 years in the building industry.

So those are the goals that we have and, um, and I really hope that that works out.

[00:57:33] **David Crabill:** So do you think you'll know, assuming the law gets changed or improved, like you'll just wanna stay as a home baker or would you've yourself having a commercial bakery at some point?

[00:57:45] **Jenny Berg:** now, I think it would be ideal if, the law changes. So that's why, you can see why I'm very motivated to work on getting, an updated. Bill passed because my goal, My preference would be to stay at home and do this baker's hours are crazy and you have to sort of be present for the duration of it.

And it would be difficult to have a commercial space be away from home. I mean, it would be a lot of wonky hours having to be there. If the law supported what I can do at home, why not? I mean, it just makes the best sense.

[00:58:23] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you, Jenny, for coming on this show today. You know, it's just amazing to see what is happening with your business. So if people want to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:39] **Jenny Berg:** Well, I think the easiest way is through my website and from there there's access to my social media and my, email and my order form. So my website is crumbsourdoughmicrobakery.com. It's a mouthful, but it should be easy to remember. And I believe if people just Googled Crumb Sourdough, I think by now my website will populate within the search engine.

[00:59:08] **David Crabill:** Sounds good. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:12] **Jenny Berg:** Well, thank you David. It was so much fun. That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:59:21] **David Crabill:** For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/74.

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