

Growing A Movement with Lisa Kivirist

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 excited to have my good friend Lisa Kivirist back on the show now, although Lisa did make a brief appearance at the end of episode 50, the last time we really talked on the show was way back in episode number five.

That was almost three years ago at the very start of the pandemic. And as you can imagine, a lot has happened since then. About a year after that, in 2021, Lisa and her husband, John Ivanko, spearheaded the first ever national conference for home-based food entrepreneurs. That conference was wildly successful with over 900 attendees, and ever since then, people keep asking me, when's the next conference? When's the next conference? And finally we've got an answer. Lisa and John are spearheading another conference, and that is only two months away. It is the only national conference for our industry, so you're not gonna wanna miss it.

It is a virtual four day conference that'll be taking place from April 10th through April 13th. So four full days of keynotes, workshops, breakout sessions, and perhaps most importantly, the community that you'll get to interact with. Now you've gotta be wondering about the costs, and that's the part that really blows me away because most multi-day virtual conferences like this cost well over a hundred dollars, if not hundreds of dollars.

But this conference will only cost you \$35 . It's the bargain of the year. And yes, that price includes everything. And even if you can't attend one of the days or you work during the day, you'll still get access to all of the recordings that you can watch on your own time. So I hope that you'll register today and you can sign up by going to cottagefoodconference.com.

Now I definitely wanted to bring Lisa on the show to talk about the upcoming conference, but we've got a lot more ground to cover in this episode. Lisa and John just recently published a second edition of their very popular book, *Homemade For Sale*.

They also helped organize one of the largest cottage food research studies ever. and Lisa recently helped Wisconsin win yet another lawsuit that dramatically

improves their law. So we've got plenty to talk about. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome back to the show, Lisa. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:42] **Lisa Kivirist:** Hey. Thanks David.

[00:02:44] **David Crabill:** Wow, it, it has been quite some time. You know, I was checking and I saw that the last time you were on the show, which was episode number five. We did that interview actually before the pandemic really kicked into gear, so it's been some time.

[00:02:59] **Lisa Kivirist:** It has. It's been a busy couple of years all around. Well, I was honored to be one of your first podcast guests there, David, and then honored to be invited back. Thank you.

[00:03:08] **David Crabill:** Well, I mean, we go way back. I remember when John your husband first called me and it was um, you wanted to make sure that I wasn't gonna write a book as well and wanted to make sure there wasn't gonna be a conflict in interest. So we go back to even before the first book, but I wanted to say congrats are in order.

You just recently published another new edition of that book.

[00:03:32] **Lisa Kivirist:** Thank you. Yeah. Homemade for sale. Fresh. Fresh off the press. The second expanded edition. And it's interesting cause I sometimes think like cottage food years are condensed in that so much has been happening. So many good things right. And so much growth that it almost feels longer than it is, but a lot of good things have happened and things have been busy.

[00:03:53] **David Crabill:** Can you just give us some kind of sense for what it actually took to create that next version? Isn't this like a multi-year process.

[00:04:03] **Lisa Kivirist:** Oh, you bet. So, the first uh, edition of Homemade for Sale came out in 2015. And the roots for that started really in around 2010 when I first connected with cottage food. When Wisconsin here first passed their first and still only cottage food law to legalize the high acid items. And that was my first encounter and John too.

And we said, Hey, wait a minute, this is really cool and what else can be done? and at the time, that was really when states started first passing cottage food laws or at least expanding them. So there was a real need for a resource because we kept talking to people who were basically saying, I didn't know you could do

that. I didn't know that was legal. Right. So that's what prompted the first book in 2015. And in the years since then, as you were just saying, things have grown, things have expanded. There were things that needed to be updated. Like yes, you can sell cottage food products in every state now. Right. In the original edition, we said, no, you can never do wholesale. No, no, no. Or other items. And of course that's changed too. So, that involved both tracking the industry like you do, and a lot of research with that as well. So the homemade for sale book is really still designed. The core roots of where it started, of a one-stop shop for folks who wanna get their cottage food businesses started as a resource that covers a little bit of everything, you know, from understanding your state's law to the marketing side, to the business side, touching on expansion, if that's where you wanna go.

So really, it, literally is an expanded edition with 10 more chapters, a hundred more pages covering more. So to your question, it's a labor of love and a process, and it's one of those things where, we really can just capture a snippet, right? Because again, so much is happening, so much creativity, and as new people start businesses adding more to that mix.

So it's a, snapshot of where we are right now with resources for folks to get started.

[00:05:54] **David Crabill:** As you mentioned, the first book was published in 2015, and I know how much of an effort is to even create an updated version of the book. What was the impetus for deciding okay, now is the right time to create the expanded edition?

[00:06:10] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure. Well, first off, fortunately readers support the books were selling out and we needed more copies. And when that happened, our publisher, new society basically said, Hey, do you wanna update this, expand this? And John and I quickly said yes, because again, so much new has come on board uh, that we wanted to both freshen it up, but more so expanded.

So new case studies, additional new chapters touched on the whole new food freedom movement, which again, wasn't on the radar back even just a couple of years ago. So, all of that together, both the need for literally more books and the opportunity to include more and new information prompted us to say, yes, let's do this.

Let's do this with the second edition.

[00:06:52] **David Crabill:** Yeah, when I think back to 2015, it was such a long time ago, in terms of the cottage food space, as you mentioned, that the food freedom movement was just starting to be talked about. I mean, there were a couple states that were trying, and that was right when Wyoming, I think it was 2015, came out with their very revolutionary law.

So so much is jammy. We look at the food freedom landscape today. I know you have a, a whole new chapter and I don't typically talk in like with a broad scope on this podcast. Can you just give kind of an overview of what sort of catching up you did with that section?

[00:07:33] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure. Because I realize your listeners and Forrager fans, we wanna get businesses started and we want practical information that'll help today. But the important thing for us all to remember, as you all know, is we're part of this bigger movement. I mean, it's happening across the country and even though we're talking about the last eight years, since 2015 as a larger stretch of time, but so much has happened in a short eight years, right?

It really is amazing and inspiring even during a pandemic and perhaps because of a pandemic that these things have come together and the movement has grown so tremendously. So yeah, food freedom was just a blip back in 2015 of this idea that you could do other things in your home kitchen in addition to the non-hazardous products.

So the fact. A, things are expanding and B, it's expanding to the point, like you're exactly right. Wyoming has led the way on of being able to do prepared foods and meals and all of that, and the, the MEHKOs laws now in California, you're at, things have really expanded and kudos to the states that have taken that leadership role to see that opportunity for small scale entrepreneurship and to support that.

And I was thrilled that, yeah, we could both include it in the second edition of *Homemade for Sale*. And again, it's Food Freedom's just starting and coming to hopefully a state close to you soon.

[00:08:52] **David Crabill:** I just wanted to clarify for some, I don't think I've mentioned this term on the podcast yet, but you, you said MEHKOs and that would refer to M-E-H-K-O a Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation or essentially a micro restaurant out of your home. So there will be coming up some examples of that type of business on the podcast, but I just wanted to clarify that for somebody if, if they heard that term, they didn't know what that meant.

But yeah, it's amazing how much has changed. And I know there's a ton of information in this book. As you said, you added over a hundred pages. There's well over 300 pages of content in this book. So where do you recommend that people get started? Because it can kind of seem overwhelming,

[00:09:34] **Lisa Kivirist:** Totally. You're right David. And that's what we wanna help avoid and support people with in the first couple of steps through the Homemade for Sale book is really the first step is to see what you can do and navigate your own state's laws. That still is the best starting point to see what is allowed, what are any steps you need to take, et cetera.

And usually in most states, that's pretty accessible via, be it the Department of Ag or the Department of health Extension. Often services check out, of course Forrager for the basics on the state. That's the first step on that. And then secondly, the business startup. And this is I think what sometimes can get overwhelming to folks in that there's sort of two tracks to cottage food business startup.

There's the cottage food side, and as you mentioned, tons of resources Now. To do that, including the book, including Forrager, including a lot of other great state sites and state uh, resources as well. There's that part of it, but then there's also the business 1 0 1 side as if you were starting a bookstore or something else of, getting your business established.

Are you gonna be L L C or a subject or s or all those logistics of tracking your expenses, et cetera. So there's that side as well. So that's again, what we try to break down in homemade for sale to help folks take step by step. This definitely doesn't have to be done overnight. It can be done incrementally and really keeping that fun factor, if you will, in the sense of all of us.

First, we're attracted to cottage food, most likely because we love to be in our kitchens, right? And we love to bake as I do, or make fudge as you do David. And we wanna keep that essence in that they still should be enjoyable. It just should move from a, giving your great stuff away to a profitable business.

[00:11:20] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, you, You and John have been one of the biggest supporters of the cottage food industry. Now there's the food freedom industry. The MEHKO, Microrestaurant industry, all wrapped into it. And of course there's this other realm, right, of commercial bakeries, commercial kitchens.

Why do you feel like you've been so focused and dedicated on the homemade food realm?

[00:11:48] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure. Well, I really feel there's something much deeper. That goes into that crossover from giving those cookies away to becoming a food entrepreneur.

And especially when we consider the majority of cottage food entrepreneurs are women. As you know, in all of your work and your interviews with the podcast, there's a lot of women who are stay-at-home moms who are making cookies, who started a side business and things grew and all of that. That's huge and empowering to again, go from giving your product away to a business owner.

It is invigorating our local communities and local economies, because this is community building 1 0 1, right, of knowing your neighbor. What can your neighbor create and supporting them with your uh, Purchases so that the money stays local, the food stays local. So cottage food is really much bigger in a positive influence in force in our country, I'd argue than just, cookies going back and forth.

It, it gets a real game changer, and that is what we see in the community that has grown nationally in states and even locally of people reaching out and supporting each other, people sharing their stories, right, like through your podcast, where we're all in this together.

And what I love about the opportunity within these cottage food businesses is really creating something that reflects your lifestyle and values.

And that idea of maintaining and balancing your cottage food business and not burning out is another theme that is new, or at least definitely highlighted more in the second edition because we were seeing that of people who were burning out in their cottage food business.

And there's a number of reasons for that in that. we we're really keen is, I know you are on pricing and making sure that you are pricing your items in a way that is profitable and fair. Most importantly to you, the producer.

We, for example, discuss three different approaches to pricing.

One is parity, which is. Basically seeing what things are priced at where you live. If you're going to a market, it's often a good way to do some research of whether generally people, pricing things at cost input calculation. We, John and

I joke that this is for folks who balance their checkbook on a regular basis every month, but this would have to do with really knowing all the ingredient costs, putting your time into there, et cetera, and using that to calculate pricing um, and market value, which that's an interesting one, especially when we look at farmer's markets and venues like that, because a product can take on a different price based on the time of year you sell.

We just wrapped up, for example, holiday markets. So there's a lot of winter markets going around here in the Midwest, and somebody shopping for a Christmas gift is looking at your jar of pickles a whole lot differently than they would be if. Picking them up for a family cookout in the middle of summer.

So market value has something to do as well. So those are three approaches to pricing, but there's a lot of that sort of um, tips and tools in the book on ways to think through your own situation. And, and that's one thing we've seen with cottage food startups is I'm sure you've seen too, where there is no cookie cutter answer to everything. Right. And it's very dependent on. Our own situation, be it where we are geographically, be it the time we have to put something in, in our own value set.

So the good thing I'd argue, the great thing about cottage food businesses is we are in control. As the owner, we can dial things up and we can also dial things down.

But that's a skillset for each of us to learn. And hearing the stories of other people and how they have done that, I find personally really inspiring and I hope others do too.

[00:15:21] **David Crabill:** Are there any examples in the book or maybe outside of the book in which you've seen somebody start from home that made a significant impact in their life?

[00:15:32] **Lisa Kivirist:** Oh, sure. Honestly, David, I almost argue just about every cottage food startup has a story like that, right? Of. A dream, a vision, a need, occasionally a crisis too that prompts us to act and follow our dreams. And

Mondavi is a really. Inspiring story of how people can reflect their cultural roots, in her case, her Indian roots and Maya Foods of creating a product that you can't necessarily even find anywhere else. So in this case, she makes ghee and other items that reflect her heritage.

And you see that a lot with cottage food entrepreneurs of small batch, small scale things that are unique and different and really encourage that. Uh, we'd write about that throughout the pages of *Homemade for Sale* of identifying what it is that makes you unique, your story. And in many cases, yeah, it goes back to our roots, our family.

What are things that we grew up with perhaps, or that our own heritage, our own cultures reflect? And, and she's a great example of that. And you, you see that again in, in various situations of people bringing things to market that would never be there otherwise.

[00:16:42] **David Crabill:** So I know you obviously expanded the book quite a lot and focused on some new elements of this industry that weren't there before, but I also saw that you put a lot more into the marketing section than you had before, and you and John both have like corporate marketing experience prior to, entering this whole space.

From what I recall I just was wondering what you added there or like what you decided to focus on more with this new edition?

[00:17:10] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure, yes. You just said marketing is key for everybody and that the bottom line need to sell those products. Right? So we expanded that tremendously in the new edition, **with** Completely new resources in anything from packaging. There's a new section to setting up your stand at the farmer's market or a market um, to looking at deeper into social media and how to utilize that strategically.

And that's where throughout the book, including yourself, people have really contributed ideas and have helped expand that as a resource. So um, sugar Cookie marketing and Corey and Heather Miracle and have been guests on your show too, really gave some of their best tips on the. Social media scene and how to capitalize that as a marketing tool in your business.

We also really added a lot of photos to the book, photos in the sense of examples from various food entrepreneurs in how they're running their cottage food businesses, from pictures from pop-up markets to various unique products. So it really is a, a collaborative effort. We're grateful to all of the ideas that people have shared with it.

But again, a lot of it focuses on that marketing side because we find that's where people really want tangible ideas, things that they can do themselves.

For example, another section, new section of the book is on packaging, and it focuses on a project that we had with a group of area farmers here and myself through the U S D A through sayer, the sustainable agriculture research education to help farmers increase sales at farmer's markets.

But the tips are universal for everybody. But in our case, being organic farmers, we really value sustainability and conservation. So in this case, we featured packaging that is made out of recycled content. What are ways to utilize that and that again reflects the values, my values, but also values of others.

So a lot of decisions people need to make, but fortunately, a lot of options too.

[00:19:07] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I remember the last time you were on the show, we talked about the website that you set up as part of that effort to teach people about packaging, and that's still active and up, right?

[00:19:20] **Lisa Kivirist:** Yep, that's cottagefoodhomebakery.com. And we actually are in a second phase of that project and we'll be adding more resources and particularly tested recipes, both that site and the Homemade for Sale book. That's another new section is we have a whole recipe section of lab tested recipes that meet non-hazardous criteria.

There's some frosting recipes in there as well uh, which is always a challenge for folks. So, yep, both the book and that website have that as well as some other marketing resources, particularly for rural areas, which can be sometimes a challenge. Because like, where I live is you have visited David in the middle of rural Wisconsin, a porch pickup.

You know, just putting things out there may not be the best strategy in selling products, but what are other things that people can do?

[00:20:04] **David Crabill:** Well, speaking about packaging, I saw in the book that you have a section about three purchase scenario. Impulse, gifts and snacks. Can you just explain those a little bit more?

[00:20:19] **Lisa Kivirist:** Yeah, I like to think of packaging as the way your product. Let's assume you know your product is terrific and tasty and wonderful packaging is how that connects with your end customer. So in that case, packaging may depend on where your um, product is being sold. Impulse purchases are something, especially if you're at a farmer's market, for example, and mom shopping for the family for the week or getting vegetables or other things or the bread, let's say, but an impulse.

Purchase is something a, a venue like that that is fun, that you can see the product that perhaps might be something to treat for the kids. So individual packaging, things that really showcase the beauty of the project. We've got some photos in the book that emphasize that. Gifts, as you mentioned, are another form of packaging where something can literally be a gift.

And that's where we talk about, for example, you can bring your 12 dozen muffins to the market and that's all fine and dandy, but by. Taking some of those, we have some examples. We're basically putting some frosting on that zucchini muffin and putting it in an individual box. Yep. You're adding more cost with the box itself, the packaging, but now it takes the onus of a gift and it looks special, and it's something that, again, somebody might have an impulse purchase to buy a gift for somebody or bring it home to a family member after market,

And snacks. Meaning, as we all know with cottage food products, Traditional cottage food sense. We're not talking food service, so we're not like slicing that cake at a market and putting on a plate with a fork. That's a whole different category of licensing. However, we can't control, nor would we want to control what somebody does with our product after they purchase it.

So in that sense, snacks of smaller quantities of items, things that people can easily pop open the bag and snack with on the way home or as they're walking around. Always a good thing to think of as well. And can often be a, you know, a very value added product in that it's something people are buying for immediate consumption and uh, hate.

If your product, I'm sure it looks good, that could be very tempting on site.

but packaging can really help sell something.

There is that added cost, and we talk more in detail on that of trying to make, that decision on that. But in today's world, with lots of options along those lines, there's really no reason to be using the Saran Wrap and baggy and boy Scout bake sale technique of packaging. There's ways to really upgrade and showcase your product readily.

[00:22:43] **David Crabill:** So I haven't had a whole lot of canned food sellers on the podcast. And I see you have a section here about jarred and canned foods and how to sell those. So I thought it might be nice if you could just explain a

little bit more about why they're unique. I think one of the things that people struggle with is making money on canned goods and, they're just an expensive item to produce.

Right. So like, what are some of the, techniques that you've used to effectively sell canned goods?

[00:23:14] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure, and you're exactly right. There is a cost input in the canned items, particularly the high acid canned items. And first and foremost, when I sell my pickles, I'm not competing against the mass marketed. Cheaper cheap pickles on the supermarket shelf. These are unique artisanal products and we really need to showcase that in our communications and marketing on it.

In the book, we have a whole section on packaging specifically for jarred products, and that's where we can have a little bit of fun with it. And by putting a. Colorful paper topper or a cloth cap on top of the product can really make it stand out and be a unique special item. and by treating it as a special item, I often like to think of those jarred items as you would've find art prints.

So we talk about in homemade for sale, for example, about you're making a small batch of something. I'm making 12 jars of my strawberry jam to literally hand label the products of, what JAR is it? It's 12 jars. This is Jar, one of 12. Two of 12, et cetera. Again, like a fine art print, which is true, which is authentic and transparent.

There are only 12 of those. So there's ways to showcase. Uniqueness of the product in a very transparent, authentic way that adds value to your product. And yeah, I mean, but on the upside I find a plus of the jarred items is they're non-perishable. So yeah, you're bringing your baked goods to market great, but what you don't sell, you know, you might have to serve up to the family.

A treat,, or as I always say, never sell anything, never produce anything that your family doesn't like to eat, because, you know, worst case scenario, that's where it goes, which is hardly a worst case scenario. But jarred items are interesting because again, they have a longer shelf life, we often see here in the farming community where farmers will often do process when they are in abundance of something to make the jams and jellies the salsas over the summer, and then use those for sale at winter markets when people are looking for something like that.

And a, a unique product with a taste of summer. So, so yeah, it's a, i I always find um, jarred items are a bit of an undervalued resource within the cottage food world because there's just not as many producers if you compare to baked goods. But there's a lot of opportunity there to stand out, especially if you're also doing baked goods and they can go hand in hand and you're doing, you can sell both your jam and some of your bread together.

However, those might cross pollinate. That's a real opportunity there.

[00:25:40] **David Crabill:** So in the book you refer a lot to a research study that was done by the University of Wisconsin Stout, and I know that you had a big hand in helping get this research study out there. Can you just share a little bit about that research study and some of the findings?

[00:25:58] **Lisa Kivirist:** You bet. So this was back when we helped organize the first home-based food entrepreneur virtual national conference back in 2021. The second is coming up this year in April, but when we did the first one, it gave us a real opportunity to tap into the people attending and, and also cottage food entrepreneurs nationally to get a sense of the pulse of where folks are at.

Do you know, to both help us in creating educational tools to help us get a pulse of the movement. So that is what the survey was about of the first ever national cottage food operator assessment in partnership with the University of Wisconsin at Stout. So, Many cases, the things that came out illustrate what many of us have known already.

We've even been talking about that. Yep. Most cottage food entrepreneurs are female. The cottage food entrepreneurs live in a variety of places. and actually it was interesting, I'll read you the numbers here. It's 33% in small towns in rural, 29% in suburbs 20% in farm and rural, 18% in urban cities, which is interesting.

We're really all over. This doesn't skew in any one area. Specifically the biggest products that people are selling or want to sell are bread and cookies, again, in the baked good side. And most folks start C F O businesses because they either want to earn some extra income or fulfill their need. Not need, but just their dream of always starting their own business.

Things we've been talking about already. So, yeah, it provided us that opportunity to really look at folks from a data standpoint actually, the, synopsis of the survey is also on our homemade for sale.com site as well as in the um, homemade for sale book as well too.

[00:27:35] **David Crabill:** Was there anything that came out of that research study that surprised you?

[00:27:40] **Lisa Kivirist:** majority of CFOs are married, which I just found an interesting side note there. And the barriers are, what I found interesting, not perhaps surprising, but like 40% of the CFOs reported having business insurance.

Meaning 60% haven't yet. And that's a barrier. Do I realize It can be complicated to find, to research to afford, et cetera. So things like that of helping provide more specific tools in navigating your business are helpful. 32% wanted to eventually have a bricks and mortar storefront, which I found interesting, meaning still the vast majority of cottage food entrepreneurs like being at home, like being.

Small in the sense of navigatable and manageable which I find really inspiring because again, as we were talking about earlier, the power in these businesses are we can turn them up, we can dial them down, we can really manage them based on our own lives and chapters of our lives, et cetera. So that is definitely an appeal and, and something that I'm, I will.

[00:28:46] **David Crabill:** Well, I could share something that surprised me from the, the study, which was this line, which says what products generate the most sales annually for current CFOs. And I was pretty sure that the number one would be decorated cakes, but it's actually the number three and it says 18% decorated cookies.

17% high acid canned goods, and 12% custom decorated cakes. Can you explain why you feel like the numbers worked out that way,

[00:29:24] **Lisa Kivirist:** Well decorated cookies are still a really unique item in that they're not something, at least to the artistic quality that cottage food entrepreneurs make them that are available otherwise. So they're very unique product. They're also something that a lot of folks have this, well, the skillset in the interest in, they can hit the ground running on it.

So I think, you know, when you look at what's the most accessible point of entry and of interest to folks that would therefore generate the most sales. The cookies make sense. The high acid canned items. Yeah, that was surprising a little bit to me too. But. It's great to see. I think it's happening more.

You, you really, almost any farmer's market you'd go to nowadays would have some people selling those items. So I think it's, more there, it may not be as sexy a product as decorated cakes or cocoa bombs or other things, but it's something that people always need and use. Right? Jam is never going out of fashion.

And that provides a bit of a, a stable piece of someone's cottage food, income pie, especially if they're diversifying with, different products. So, yeah, that was interesting to see.

[00:30:27] **David Crabill:** Yeah, it was interesting. I mean, I, feel like it sort of confirmed a trend that I've noticed, which is this trend towards decorated cookies. I don't know if there's been a trend away from decorated cakes, but there's definitely been a trend towards decorated cookies. And So it was just interesting for me to see that. But As you mentioned, it was a year after the last interview we did that you put on the first ever national conference for home-based food businesses.

So can you share a little bit about what went into that?

[00:31:02] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure. We're really excited about the next one coming up. So this was back in 2021 when John and I were feeling the time was ripe on a number of levels to bring together cottage food entrepreneurs and leaders like yourself on the national sphere to come together, to share, to learn from each other, to connect, to collaborate and network.

And partly due, because of Covid and the pandemic, is that these virtual spaces were much more accessible. People were used to them, et cetera. So we had a very successful pilot back in 2021 with over 900 people attending from across the country. And that has now led to the second conference coming up this April, April 10th.

In 2023 and we're so excited that you're gonna be back keynoting again. Thank you so much, David. Giving us a perspective of things from your Forrager lens. And it is hosted by Renewing the Countryside, a nonprofit we've worked a lot with that does a lot in this realm of supporting local food businesses and these kind of cottage food startups.

So we just have a great array of partners and speakers coming together and are very excited for that to happen. And the good news is in the virtual space, it can be super affordable too. Just \$35 for all four days. Everything's gonna be recorded. You can access it any time. And what was a real surprise to me, a

pleasant surprise in the first pilot, and I expect will even be even more amplifying this year, is the community that erupted, literally pop-up community around the conference in that virtual space.

The conference will be on the Whova platform, which is a quite a standard uh, platform company that hosts these sort of things. And with, once you are registered and in the app and everything is live, you can pop in there already. People started self organizing chat groups on everything from stay-at-home moms and how do you manage your businesses to vegan bakers, to keto bakers, to what are, you know, how do you manage burnout when you're taking on too much, et cetera.

So a real opportunity for us to both informally share in those kind of settings and then to learn from the great ray of speakers that are scheduled. So yeah, we're real excited. Again, thanks for you are in all Forrager support. We are looking forward to it and grab your space because we're hoping to have a, even a bigger crowd this.

[00:33:26] **David Crabill:** Oh yeah, I remember the community the last time and it was alive. I mean, it was just amazing to see. And I'm sure you got this on your side too, but the next year world around 2022 and people were like, is there gonna be another conference? Is there gonna, is there gonna be another conference?

And I'm like uh, don't, not this year, maybe next year. So, Glad that you guys decided to do it. Cause I know it's a lot of work to put on a conference.

[00:33:52] **Lisa Kivirist:** Totally. No, it is. And um, So every two years, all good uh, ready to go and things are live and um, we look forward to literally seeing everybody in that space. So, yeah.

[00:34:04] **David Crabill:** Well, I just think the cost of the conference is just mind blowing to me. It's just, it's so affordable. Especially if you compare it to almost any other conference even virtual conferences in any other space. And you talked a little bit about the partners that you have to put this conference on.

Can you share a little bit about how you actually are making it so affordable for people? for.

[00:34:28] **Lisa Kivirist:** Oh, sure. Yeah. Thank you. The virtual space really has opened up a lot in that realm, in that we can do that , you know, there's just the. Infrastructure cost is much more affordable all around. Plus we've had a

great group of sponsors who have come together, including, Cast Iron, the Food Freedom Foundation, Sugar Cookie Marketing, our own publisher, new society publishers, has donated an a bunch of uh, homemade for sale books. We're gonna have a drawing for early registrants, so sign up now and you can see the whole list on Conference site, but it really is a great coming together collaboratively and a great speaker list as well.

The keynotes in addition to you, I'll be chatting. And Erica Smith from the Institute for Justice, thanks to her work and the Institute for Justice, has really fought for good policy and this whole new food freedom initiative and all those things around the law side of it. And Corey and Heather Miracle with Sugar Cookie Marketing will also be doing a keynote.

So every day it's the afternoon, there's both a keynote and then the online workshops, everything will be taped as well, so you can watch it at your convenience and we're really excited. All came together nicely.

[00:35:39] **David Crabill:** So as you think back on the first conference, everything was just so new back then. This had never been done before. On a national level, can you remember some of the things that you learned from that, that you're now taking into the second conference?

[00:35:57] **Lisa Kivirist:** when we were talking about the connections people make this conference was in 2021 and still today, really the opportunity for cottage food entrepreneurs, whether you have started your business already or are in the process to connect with each other in a more personal setting. Social media 1 0 1.

Right. So it was interesting to see those connections made and learn about the similarities. It seems like everybody has challenges in their state, you know, in the sense of getting regulations changed and tweaked and explaining something to their health department and, and, and, you know, those are different flavors, but universal, wherever you are.

And it was very rewarding and supportive to know that amongst other people and share those stories because it can easily, we can easily become isolated in our own business, on our own islands, if you will, and to hear other. Challenges shared by other people. That went a long way. So I'm excited to see that organizing again happen in that space.

And the fact that both in the first conference, and most definitely now too, that we have such a great array of speakers who are willing to, not just willing, but

so jumping in generously to share their stories. And when I say share stories as as you have on the podcast, David, we are very transparent as entrepreneurs.

It's not just, here's what I do, but here's how I got there and here's what worked. And more importantly, here's what didn't work for me, and maybe it will work for you or maybe not, but that Transparent sharing and particularly see that in the workshops is really great and different than I would argue business 1 0 1.

Right? If you went to some business school professor and said, Hey, you know, we're gonna gather entrepreneurs and everybody's gonna share how they do things and what their failures and successes were, I think we probably think we're nuts. Like, why would you do that? Why would you really wear your business on your sleeve and encourage what, quote unquote others would call competition?

But we know better in our cottage food space, right? It's collaborative. The more businesses we help support, the stronger our movement grows overall. That's definitely something we've seen in the years since the first edition of *Homemade for Sale* came out. It's because of the numbers of cottage food entrepreneurs that we can have a second edition, that we can have a second conference, that things are growing to the point they are, and we want, we want that to continue for sure.

[00:38:20] **David Crabill:** Well, I'm definitely looking forward to the upcoming conference and I think speak on behalf of a lot of people in our community, especially the ones who went to the first one, which is thank you for putting it on and uh, we're all looking forward to it for sure. Now I just thinking about what's happened in the last three years since we spoke and, you know, Obviously you've got this new book out.

You did a conference on a national level, but another major thing a resource that you've created since then is this new course of yours. Right. Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:38:55] **Lisa Kivirist:** So, yeah. Thank you. Um, so on u the Udemy platform, I have a cottage food course that's over now over five hours and we're adding more to it on *homemade for sale*. How to set up and market a food business from your home kitchen again to create more resource options for folks. So, thanks to the increasing virtual world, we can offer things like that affordably that people can use as a home self-study.

Work through it as you can. once people sign up for these sort of courses on Udemy, you have access to them forever. So you can review, I'll do, be doing updates, et cetera. So that's a new one as well. That I'm, I'm really pleased on in that people learn different ways too, and we need to have different tools.

So we've got the book, we've got the course, we've got the conference. Different ways for people to either launch if they need that boost or expand and grow, if that's where they're at, their cottage food businesses.

[00:39:49] **David Crabill:** Did you see the course as sort of being like an expansion or extension of the book?

[00:39:56] **Lisa Kivirist:** Yeah, that's a great question. Exactly. It covers the topics in the book, but in a different way in that too some people are more visual, auditory learners. It enabled me to personally in, in that space, connect with people. And I really do enjoy that teaching platform and being able to talk and share on that level.

There are more visuals and more color and all of that as well, so they're intended to go hand in hand and build off each other, but provide a more complete learning resource for folks in the cottage food space.

[00:40:35] **David Crabill:** So another thing that's happened over the last three years is progress in Wisconsin and Wisconsin's just such a unique state. I mean, there have been states that have struggled and have had challenges. I don't know if there's been a state quite like Wisconsin though.

Can you share a little bit about what's transpired? I'm pretty the first lawsuit had gone through the last time we spoke, but just share a little bit about what's going on on the ground in your.

[00:41:04] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure. So it is sort of, I don't know what the word is, even ironic or hilarious that my cottage food journey started where and still is, where I'm here in Wisconsin when the first cottage food law passed in Wisconsin for high acid foods back in 2010. That's where my first connection came and I was like, wow, we can do this in home kitchens.

This is awesome. And as my own cottage food journey evolved, particularly in the educational space with the books and the courses and the conference looking at things nationally, there has always been work to be done here in my home state in Wisconsin. And as folks might be familiar, this, this story has

been going on for a while, but this bottom line could not get a cottage food law passed.

Thanks to our I would argue lack of leadership amongst our elected officials and not being able to even get on the agenda for a vote in our assembly. So fortunately, we do have three branches of democracy and thanks to support from the good lawyers at the Institute for Justice non-profit law firm that represents underdog cases like ours.

We had a lawsuit that the judge ruled on in 2017, which basically lifted the existing ban on the sale of home baked goods that since then, baked goods have been. Legal for sale in Wisconsin. Yay. And one thing that wasn't included in that was that ruling was very specific to baked goods i.e. things that go in the oven and come out as not potentially hazardous, but that does not include a lot of items that are perfectly safe to sell, that don't go in the oven like candy for example, are those infamous cocoa bombs, roasted coffee, dried herbs, all those sort of things.

So that prompted a second lawsuit that we filed in 2020. One, it went to court last year in August of 2022. And yes, to what you just said, the judge ruled in our favor. end of December in 2022 as we speak, we're still a little in the waiting game to see if the state will appeal, which they might do and what might happen.

But things are moving in our favor. It just is a very unusually weird route, shall we say. And I do appreciate sharing the story because I hope anybody outside of Wisconsin listening to this, even though sometimes things may, I realize, get clunky in getting your laws passed and expanded and navigating regulations and creating them.

At least you're doing it, and I kudos to you. And that's the way it's supposed to work. But the good news is that when things don't work the way they're supposed to work, we do have options. And we're sort of the, poster child for that here in Wisconsin.

[00:43:42] **David Crabill:** What has been crazy. You said that you were waiting to see if, the Ag Department will appeal, I'm almost certain that they will, it seems like they've done everything under the sun to try to limit home bakers, It's just crazy. I mean, you, you talked about this new lawsuit that went through

but there were even more things on top of that. I feel like that's happened didn't, they try to say like, oh, this, this is only applicable to you, Lisa Kivirist

[00:44:06] **Lisa Kivirist:** Oh,. There have been so many layers to this. Indeed. When the first ruling came out back to the baked goods lawsuit, the first lawsuit, and the judge ruled in our favor. And at the time there were three plaintiffs, myself and two good fellow farmer friends of mine, Della Ends and Chris Marion. And he ruled in favor of the plaintiffs.

And for a while there the state interpreted that as well. Plaintiffs meaning Lisa Della and Chris can bake and these are just odd. Barriers that we keep fighting here of like, well, no, no, no. We had to go through another round with the judge and basically have him confirm uh, no, excuse me. But when I rule, it's for everybody.

you know, it's not select people that it applies to when a judge does a ruling. That's the point. So yeah, we had that, that we had to go on other round on. They were interpreting baked goods as items that include flour and we had to go another round and it's like, no, no. But his, his ruling didn't say that it goes in the oven, but there are lots of things that go in the oven, granola, for example, that doesn't have to have flour and it's perfectly safe.

So yeah, as I'm calculating here, it's been a solid 10 years that we've been at this in Wisconsin um, the moral to the story is to elect. Quality representatives that support small scale businesses like ours, that want to take down barriers that support entrepreneurship in general, not just, you know, us as cottage food folks, but all small scale businesses need the support of our state, and we need elected officials who do that.

So, My best case scenario is to see more cottage food entrepreneurs in elected office. those are the people we need, making those sort of decisions for us on a state level.

[00:45:50] **David Crabill:** Wisconsin seems like it's had the hardest road to get even a basic ruling in place. But what's ironic is that I argue that your, like quasi law, I guess whatever you want to call it now is probably better than whatever cottage food law would've passed through the legislature.

[00:46:13] **Lisa Kivirist:** That's a really good point, David. It is. It is ironic in that Technically, we do not have a law in Wisconsin. Again, the way democracy's supposed to work, where we have a bill and it passes and all of that

never happened and won't with the current administration. So we have a judge's ruling. So it is perfectly legal to sell your for example, baked goods.

But because we don't have a law, the Department of Ag or Department of Health, department of Ag, in Wisconsin's case, they don't make laws. They just implement them. And if there's no law to implement, you cannot have regulations. Therefore, yet, to your point, we don't have a gross sales cap. We don't have restrictions in that sense.

We have to sell non-hazardous products, sell direct to our customer, sell within the state of Wisconsin, all the basics. Okay, fine. That's fair and easy enough. But yeah, on the flip side, we have a very supportive situation currently in Wisconsin. So the good news on that is we have had. Hundreds, if not thousands now of businesses start up.

When we had the second lawsuit happen, we started the Wisconsin cottage food Association that has over a thousand members now. So we've developed a really strong collaborative community here to come together on these things because eventually sure, we will, we should have a law. But when that happens, we will have definitely our, cookies and ducks in a row and have these stories to share about the positive impact of these small scale food businesses on a state's economy.

[00:47:47] **David Crabill:** You mentioned the association and it's one of just a few state associations in the country. Can you share a little bit about what started that or why you felt like an association was important?

[00:48:01] **Lisa Kivirist:** we started it right when we did have the second lawsuit in part, to avoid what happened before where the ruling was interpreted as only the plaintiff's. Well, the Wisconsin cottage food Association is a plaintiff in the second lawsuit, so just join the association. It's free and it all applies to you, but hopefully we don't need to defend that route anymore.

And it has basically, evolved to a very strong mechanism to keep in touch in our state, to bring entrepreneurs together. And there's a section in the new book too, on how to organize a state association or group or whatever you wanna call it. But in all our cases, there will be situations in every state where new proposals are made, new laws may come on the plate, or as we were talking about earlier, the whole food freedom movement.

It's coming hopefully soon and it needs organizing behind it. And in organizing its communication with people who are running successful businesses already to

share, who are interested in perhaps some new opportunities that a potential new law might bring about. So that really helps organize and have a voice for the community because arguably we don't have money in the sense of perhaps like other corporate Association entities might have, but we do have power and strength in number and we most definitely have strength in our stories of what we have achieved individually and together.

And that does, I hope, still move democracy, move our lawmakers to create situations that are supportive.

[00:49:36] **David Crabill:** Well, it's pretty impressive what you've been able to accomplish in Wisconsin with the association with the lawsuits and work is never complete.

Right. So are you uh, aiming for something else? Like what are you putting your resources into next to uh, improve things in Wisconsin?

[00:49:53] **Lisa Kivirist:** Sure. Well, with this second lawsuit, we're, we're sitting in a good situation here in the sense that we can sell what we wanna sell. To your earlier point, we don't have restrictive regulations around that. So right now the priority is to do, as we're doing, of encouraging folks, supporting folks to start businesses, coming to things like the National conference and learning from other folks.

I'm proud that in the first pilot one, the, we had, I think the highest attendance from the state of Wisconsin. So we definitely are out there to learn and connect. And then eventually, although I, I wouldn't put a date on this anytime yet or soon, but when we have some new elected officials, then we'll need to organize and rally and, and have a good law passed that would be reflective of the work and accomplishments the state has had to date when it comes to these business startups.

So, yeah. In the meantime, I'm hoping what will really happen is we'll have just this rush of new. Things that don't go in the oven. Businesses, the cocoa bomb people are ready to start and roll in Wisconsin. Along with all those other unique candies and things that as we head into 2023, we will be seeing hopefully at market.

[00:51:06] **David Crabill:** so with this most recent lawsuit, I know it started in 2021 and then, you know, at the very end of 2022, it came to a resolution and you guys won. and I'll announce it and everyone's like, awesome, that's

amazing. But what is it like in your shoes? What is it like to actually go through a potentially multi-year process?

Like what has it actually been like to be involved in these very unique lawsuits?

[00:51:34] **Lisa Kivirist:** It's funny, David, because I used to joke about this as sort of my toddler, you know, we've been at it a couple years and now I think it's a viable teenager. So personally, honestly, it's rewarding in the sense that. It makes me realize that we can all make a difference in these situations, and that really is reflective of our cottage food mood, movement nationally, where the majority of these laws, everything that has happened is because of a cottage food entrepreneur speaking up, do you know?

And initiating something and stepping forward and suggesting, et cetera. And there's power in that. And there's power in, again when things don't work, perhaps as they normally do that there's alternative routes and there's support that you can get in the sense of, for us working with the Institute for Justice.

So that part's empowering in knowing that. There are options, we can work together and make change. And also it personally is developing patience in me because these kind of fights take a long time as I've said, you know, we're in the year mark, years mark now, almost decades. So it's hanging in there.

But having more people on board now as we roll, having the association, having that community build around it and to see the results of that is very rewarding. So we have a lot of fun as we roll with all of this. Uh, One must have a sense of humor, but it's bringing people together in new ways and it's connecting the advocacy element directly with the business side that. I'm hoping will keep us, will empower in other directions. Again, be it cottage food entrepreneurs, run for office, or if they hit other barriers that they're willing to address them, discuss them, fight for them. And we need to see that across the country because that's how change happens.

[00:53:22] **David Crabill:** Well, fortunately for Wisconsin, there are people like yourself,, that are patient and persistent. Fortunately for people in the rest of the states, it's at least easier and that's not always easy for sure. But in most states it is a bit easier to be uh, moving forward A cottage food initiative of some sort, but hopefully people can look at your example and be inspired by that because I have no idea where Wisconsin would be today if it weren't for your leadership. I know it's a lot bigger than you. The Institute for Justice is a big part of it, and there are many people involved. But certainly your leadership

has been a big part of where we are today with Wisconsin. So I thank you on behalf of the larger cottage food community.

I thank you for that

[00:54:10] **Lisa Kivirist:** Oh, thank you, David. We're providing entertainment if nothing else but. I appreciate that.

[00:54:15] **David Crabill:** So. I just want to ask you as we kind of wrap things up here about your perspective. Not too many people have such a broad perspective on a nationwide scale across all the different industries. As you look at sort of where we've come over the past decade where do you see us heading?

[00:54:39] **Lisa Kivirist:** Yeah. Oh, that's the great hopeful question of the future, right? I'm really jazzed about this whole starting nationally food freedom movement and the opportunity to do more in our kitchens. The opportunity to earn more money and the opportunity to keep more things local. So that is, again, it wasn't even on the radar when we first wrote homemade for sale or, an infant at best, right?

And there's a lot of positive success stories coming out from the states that have embraced this. So the more that states can be forward thinking and not conventional, the mindset of like, well, what are, you know, what are businesses we can attract to our state to create jobs? Rather, how can we support small scale home-based entrepreneurs?

That has a huge impact there. And the fact that. We have grown as a movement so much in number and the fact that there are again, just, just more, more of us is really inspiring. And the fact that, as we talked about earlier, that particularly women can go from giving those cookies away to owning a food business.

The empowerment and confidence building behind that readily resonates in other areas of one's life too. So all of those things add up to, I feel a real hopeful, positive future. I'm excited and I feel there's so much creativity within this movement and interesting ways to address barriers. We write about a lot that in the Homemade for Sale book, and that's what fuels a lot of these new chapters and pages of everything from porch popups, you know, to cocoa bombs, to all of these things that.

Somebody both came up with developed and importantly shared. And I'm excited to about things that aren't even on our radar yet, you know, and, and what may come and what may help expand. and two, this all relates to things

that were only magnified during the pandemic of food security in our communities.

And the more we can be making things locally, the stronger that is for all of us. So that also gives me hope.

[00:56:47] **David Crabill:** Well, thanks for all that you have done to help support this industry or really these industries over the past decade plus. And um, can you just share where people can find you? Find the book, sign up for the conference, all that.

[00:57:05] **Lisa Kivirist:** You bet. And thank you, David for all your work on behalf of Forrager and the podcast and all the outreach you do nationally. It's information like that that you're getting out there that is. All these pieces are coming together and I'm excited and thank you. And yeah, so for us, for John and I, homemadeforsale.com is our main site for the book.

And all of the things we've mentioned from the conference to the Udemey course to the resources through the SARE Project can all be found on there. And you can pop us a note as well, if anything, any questions and look forward to crossing paths with folks in multiple ways especially at the upcoming conference.

Thank you.

[00:57:49] **David Crabill:** Well yeah, definitely looking forward to that conference, and thank you again so much for coming on and sharing with us today.

[00:57:57] **Lisa Kivirist:** Thank you, David.

[00:57:59] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

Now, as I mentioned at the beginning, we're just a couple months away from the next home-based Food Entrepreneur conference. You're not gonna wanna miss it. It's only \$35, and you can sign up by going to [cottage food conference.com](http://cottagefoodconference.com).

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/81.

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