

The Freeze Dried Trend with Janna Newcomb Walworth

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 Janna Newcomb Walworth. But real quick, I wanted to check, have you created a website for your business yet? And if you have, do you pay for it?

[00:00:18] A lot of entrepreneurs still think they need to spend money to get a good website, and that is simply not true anymore. I am 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.

[00:00:35] And in case you think free also means cheap. It's actually quite the opposite. I think Square Online is hands down the very best website tool out there for most cottage food businesses. So if you wanna learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to forrager.com/website. All right, so I have Janna Newcomb Walworth on the show today.

[00:00:55] Janna lives in Choctaw, Oklahoma and sells freeze dried foods with her cottage food business, Janna's Freeze Dried. Freeze dried foods, and especially freeze dried candy has become a big cottage food trend since the beginning of the pandemic. Janna bought a freeze dryer in 2020 to help preserve her family's food, but little did she know that it would turn into a thriving business soon people were asking to buy her products, stores started asking to sell them, and demand has organically grown to the point where she now has five freeze dryers, which cost a few thousand dollars each.

[00:01:34] Janna has become pretty obsessed with freeze drying, anything and everything. And as you'll see, it's paid off in a big way. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Janna. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:50] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I'm very happy to be here.

[00:01:52] **David Crabill:** Janna, can you take us back to how you started freeze drying?

[00:01:58] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** Well, my husband actually wanted a freeze dryer for several years, and I wasn't very familiar with the process or the concepts, when COVID hit, it was one of those things we'd been discussing and we decided to go ahead and, proceed with getting a freeze dryer and everything.

[00:02:18] And we did that. We went ahead and ordered one our intent was to put away our garden, to have food put away and basically have. Food storage that didn't require any kind of refrigeration or freezer was shelf stable included. vegetables, meats, everything you could possibly think of.

[00:02:39] I will say that was my original intent with the freeze dryer.

[00:02:42] **David Crabill:** So, I mean, I know that freeze drying has got become very, very popular, especially in the last couple of years. Uh, Some people are maybe not too familiar about what the process is like or what it is. Can you just kind of give a brief overview of what freeze drying is and kind of how it works?

[00:03:01] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** Freeze drying is kind of the next step in the evolution of food preservation. most of us have either seen or done the home canning with the mason. Jars and things like that. Freeze drying actually requires a freeze jar, a freeze drying unit, and what it does is you can put in your fresh food or cooked food or whatever you'd like, and it has a vacuum chamber inside the unit.

[00:03:31] And what it does is it takes it down to about 40 below zero, round that area, and then it draws a very significant vacuum on on that chamber. And what it's doing is it's actually simulating a, a very high altitude environment so that you have sublimation take place. And sublimation is where the ice inside the food from it being so cold instead of melting and evaporating away.

[00:04:00] When heat is applied, it actually goes directly into a vapor. So you have the process of the ice actually going straight to a vapor. It then collects on the side inside of the chamber, away from the food and that's how the food ends up being so perfectly dry when the process is complete. the really cool thing about freeze drying is if you are freeze drying raw food.

[00:04:25] Fresh food, you retain more nutritional value than you would with traditional canning and other preservation means such as dehydration. And it creates a nice texture that a lot of people enjoy, even if they don't reconstitute it. A lot of people will just eat a lot of the fruits and vegetables almost like chips.

[00:04:46] I mean, it's a really good way to make snacks and things like that. With freeze drying, you have a perfectly dry product that has no moisture in it whatsoever. And when sealed properly in Mylar bags with oxygen absorbers, you don't have any oxygen in the package. With the food, you don't have any water for any kind of microbial growth.

[00:05:09] So that's also one of the attractions to freeze drying is that it's really one of the safer methods to preserve food for long-term. If stored properly and processed properly and packaged, as it should be, your shelf life can reach up to 25 years. That's, what I've seen in a lot of my research and things, but I will say I do not have any food that I have had around that long.

[00:05:38] It's a really fascinating method and concept that you can actually take food and store it at room temperature. It can be meat, it can be vegetables, it can be fruit. If the power goes out, if you go camping a lot, if you go hiking, you can literally just open a bag, add some hot water, and you've got a hot meal. There's just a lot of options that you can do.

[00:06:01] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, freeze dried foods have been around for a long time. Right. And I've always sort of thought of them as being catered towards hikers. That's, I think was one of the biggest markets before kind of this massive uptick. And I've definitely noticed in the last couple years, especially since the pandemic, this mass growth and interest in freeze dried foods, especially freeze dried candy.

[00:06:28] I mean, I assume you've seen the same thing and do you know how this sort of like massive growth and interest came to be?

[00:06:36] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I honestly think Covid and you know, the shutdowns, the lockdowns, I think that had a lot to do with it. And I think people go into the grocery stores and seeing some bare shelves and seeing the empty cases got people thinking about how do we preserve our food? And especially people who around here seem to have gotten more into wanting to grow their own food, have a garden, raise their own chickens, that kind of thing.

[00:07:04] I think in a way it's kind of been good because it kind of forced a lot of people back into a relationship of actually seeing where their food comes from and being involved in that production. I think a lot of the reason people are wanting the freeze dryers because it gives them more possibilities on how they basically preserve what they do produce.

[00:07:28] for a longer period of time. It doesn't require any additional, electricity to keep it, in a freezer, in a refrigerator, it's very portable because it's lightweight. If you drop a Mylar bag, it doesn't break like a mason jar.

[00:07:42] It's not heavy. There's just a lot of benefits. I mean, and that's not even getting into the, the higher nutritional values. You know exactly what is in your product because you created it. And that's the part of it I love, and that's the part that I think a lot of people really admire about this process is when you have freeze dried strawberries, your ingredient is strawberries.

[00:08:10] there's nothing in there other than what you put into it.

[00:08:14] It doesn't have the preservatives, it doesn't have the extra sodium,

[00:08:18] it doesn't have those things in it. I will admit I do use lemon juice to keep my apples from browning in the freeze dryer. That's the whole grand extent of my preservatives.

[00:08:32] **David Crabill:** Well, certainly there's a lot of benefits to freeze drying as you laid out the shelf life. That obviously has business benefits too. You don't have to worry about anything going bad. And then course the nutritional value and just being able to preserve things. But also the freeze drying process actually changes the flavor of some of these things, right?

[00:08:53] Like there are more intense flavors. I think that's like surprised a lot of people. They weren't maybe aware of that. Can you explain a little bit about that and, how that works?

[00:09:02] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I will say on some items, especially the candies and especially things that are salty, things like that, you definitely have a concentration of those flavors. Um, I play with my food. I have stuck all kinds of things in there just to see what would happen.

[00:09:22] I freeze-dried things such as pickles. Not to mention, I also freeze dry a lot of candy and I do sell a lot of that, but It's no longer suspended in water inside that product. So if you freeze dry a pickle, a pickle is a cucumber. It's mostly water. And then you've, taken it, you've, pickled it, it's been in the brine.

[00:09:44] There's salt, there's all this flavor and things as a way of preserving that cucumber, but then you freeze dry it and you take out probably 80%. Or more of that item because that's all the water weight. when you do eat it, you're getting a very intense, concentrated flavor on some of the items.

[00:10:05] Now, other items Aren't as affected. I love raspberries and strawberries and, and bananas because you do get that good flavor that is pretty much what you put into the machine. You still get that fresh strawberry, fresh raspberry taste. Other items like pineapple. I do think it makes it a little bit more intense, a little bit sweeter to me.

[00:10:29] Eating a freeze dried pineapple is almost like eating candy. It's just so sweet and good, and I absolutely love it. And the great thing about freeze-dried fruit is does have a crisp texture. you can eat it almost like chips or a snack. it's interesting to eat. It's not what you would expect. I freeze bananas.

[00:10:52] It's not your banana chips. They're not coated in sugar. I literally just slice the bananas, place them on the tray, place them in the freeze dryer,. Let it do its thing, run through the process, and I will check and ensure that they're dry. And I have a habit of, running them additional time just to ensure all my products are absolutely dry.

[00:11:14] But it's great because If I want to puree that and make a banana powder and use that, add it to a recipe or add it to a smoothie, there's a lot of things I can do with that final product other than just reconstituting it, rehydrating it, or eating it the way it comes out of the, the freeze dryer.

[00:11:36] **David Crabill:** So I know you can make a whole lot of things in the freeze dryer. What are some of the most interesting things you've made?

[00:11:46] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** The most interesting things I've made. My husband and I, we both love pickled beets, but we love the homemade pickled beets and I'm just playing with it and I thought, oh, I wonder how these would turn out.

[00:12:01] So we actually sliced them and freeze dried them. they were a hit, my first batch did not last, not a single one of them ended up being stored because we sat there and we just kept snacking on them because it was so good and so interesting to us. So that was probably one of my more unusual items.

[00:12:21] Cheesecake, I've done, vegetables out of my garden. cranberry salad, which does not sound that exciting, but crumbling it up using it, kind of like granola, and it ended up being like, fantastic that way.

[00:12:36] And that was something I didn't anticipate. It was finding a different use for that. there's not really a limit to what you can freeze dry. the only thing that you can't freeze dry are oily items. You can heat oil all day.

[00:12:52] It's not going to reduce. so you can't really freeze dry like chocolate or peanut butter because there's just too much oil. But really other than that, the sky's the limit. you can freeze dry meat like beef, chicken, pork, whatever you'd like. And.

[00:13:08] You can freeze, dry it raw, you can freeze dry it cooked, there's just really no limits. I mean, you can freeze dry separate ingredients and put together your own soup mixes. You can make the soup and freeze dried that.

[00:13:20] I wanna say there's really nothing super unusual that I've done because any kind of food I'm all for sticking it in there and seeing how it'll come out, and just experimenting,

[00:13:33] **David Crabill:** One of the items that I just never would've imagined would freeze drives like ice cream. I saw you have ice cream freeze dried.

[00:13:43] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I do. it's called astronaut ice cream. And if you've ever been to like a science museum or anything like that, that's typically one of the standards in the gift shop is you go in and you get your astronaut ice cream. I think it really makes people stop and, kind of wonder what's going on here?

[00:14:01] Because yes, it is ice cream, it's just freeze dried. It retains its shape, it retains its flavor, and you can take a bite of it. It will retain its texture, but at the same time, your brain is telling you, There's something wrong, there's something missing because it's not cold. So it's not unusual for us to have, a jar of ice cream sandwiches or little scoops of ice cream sitting on the counter to snack on because just fun.

[00:14:31] And I did ship some to my brother in Wyoming you know, you go to the post office and they ask you if there's anything liquid, flammable, dangerous, and so on. And, and I was like, no. I said, I'm just shipping my brother ice cream. And she's looking at me like, I don't think you're quite right in the head, but I had to explain it.

[00:14:50] You know, I freeze dried ice cream and, and I'm actually shipping my brother ice cream. So she actually, laughed at that, I don't think that was what she was expecting me to say that I was actually shipping that day.

[00:15:01] **David Crabill:** Well, is there anything that. You've been able to freeze dry? No, they're like a slight limit with the oily stuff, but like that you did freeze dry, but really wasn't that good in a freeze dried form.

[00:15:16] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I did some thin cut. dill pickles, like the pre sliced, because I was, you know, I'll admit I was trying to cut corners and they were just like salty little pieces of paper. They were just not good whatsoever to me. So I did have to experiment with different pickles and things. And there's some brands that will do fantastic and there's some things that will just not do well.

[00:15:42] There's some gummy candy, there is a certain brand, it does not freeze dry very well that of course was the first time I'd ever really tried to freeze dry gummies. And I had that brand I'd put like gummy worms into the machine and I pulled them out and they've got bubbles and things and they're just not looking right.

[00:16:02] And. I'm just sitting here wondering like how did they turn out like this? Because they looked normal coming in and I pulled them out and it looked like I'd given gummy worms leprosy. It was just really not pretty. Actually did some, I believe it was cinnamon bears, just experimenting, you know, seeing what will work, what won't work, and those do not work, but they kind of end up being like a very hard rubber and almost impossible to eat.

[00:16:32] Although my husband was very adamant about actually trying to still eat them, and I was just like, oh, these are no longer fit for human consumption. So That was probably the funniest one, is like we still joke about turning those into something that was like industrial rubber, industrial glue, because there was just no way it was ever going to be a viable product.

[00:16:53] **David Crabill:** So what are some of the items that you sell that sell really well? What are some of the most popular things that people buy?

[00:17:01] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** People love sour gummy worms. They love peach rings. There's a lot of the, like, nostalgic types, candy things like jolly ranchers, milk duds, different things like that. Bit of honey. Skittles are super popular all over the place. There's a lot of different candies that can be freeze-dried and do really well saltwater taffy a lot of your really chewy sticky candies are absolutely fantastic freeze-dried because they are fluffy, they're not sticky, they're not chewy, they are dried in a vacuum so that they do puff up.

[00:17:44] And like if you take a piece of salt water taffy and you freeze dry it, it's going to come out after the cycle about the size of a golf ball. And that's one piece of candy, but the texture is no longer sticky and chewy. It's going to very soft to bite into, but it's going to just melt in your mouth almost like a malted milk ball or like a butter mint.

[00:18:10] It's just one of those things like the sugar's gonna hit your tongue and it's just going to dissolve. So it's really nice. I have a lot of folks who love the Chew Your candies, freeze dried, because there's just really uncomfortable trying to eat the very chewy versions of those.

[00:18:27] **David Crabill:** Now, you got the freeze dryer for yourself so you could preserve things. Things, when did you start to think, well, we could actually make some money from selling some of these items?

[00:18:40] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** That was actually a complete and total accident. We got the freeze dryer late in the year. I went through my freezer, I freeze-dried everything around the house I could get my hands on I'd watch some YouTube videos and people were freeze drying candy, and My first thought was why like you have this machine that you can put food inside of and process and this food is good for 25 years and you're putting candy inside there instead. I just couldn't wrap my head around it. But do have three kids and, they're teenagers they're watching social media and they're like, oh, this is really cool.

[00:19:19] Look, there's freeze dried this, freeze dried that. And I'm like, okay, well we'll try it. And of course they loved it and they loved the ice cream and, and things like that. And I have a very dear friend that I grew up with I knew at the time she had four teenagers. And so I thought, well, I'll see what her kids think. Well, when I went to see her, I didn't realize that she and her husband were starting a business and looking for kind of a snack option.

[00:19:45] And so I had taken her and her family a, kind of a variety of ice cream and candies and, different things like that. Next thing I know is she's asking me, can I sell your candy? This is, you know, we're gonna start our business. This is what it is, and we wanna sell your candy. And it was like, I don't know. I had to start kind of doing the research and seeing, okay, what are my cottage laws? What are my options? What's allowed, what's not allowed? But I had also taken some to work and it was one of those things where I was starting to get more and more requests of, well, if I bring you this kind of candy, will you freeze dry it for me?

[00:20:25] Or can I get some more of, this candy that you brought in last time? And I didn't really mean to start a business. It was just one of those things. I enjoyed it. I had fun with it. It was kind of a creative outlet for me, and I thought, well, why not? Let's see where it goes. So I did start researching the cottage laws and very

[00:20:45] lucky for me about a year or so after I started, I did set up an L L C and made sure I was operating, within the laws and everything. I had taken whatever courses I needed, know, food handlers, you name it. They actually kind of revamped our Oklahoma cottage law and made it much more appealing to more people.

[00:21:08] they kind of opened up more variety of foods and. increase the, dollar amount that you could earn in a year, and they really made it where it was much more approachable by the average person. So that was something that has happened here in the last few years that really, I think has impacted a lot of the, cottage food industry in our area.

[00:21:33] **David Crabill:** Yeah, no, I actually, for the longest time, Oklahoma had one of the worst laws in the country. So you're very fortunate that that amendment came through. And I think one of the biggest restrictions was that you could only sell from your home. And Oklahoma had that restriction for the longest time. I think it was maybe only limited to baked goods and candy, uh, if I recall correctly.

[00:21:57] So it was pretty limited. And now you can sell wherever in the state. You can sell in storage, you can sell at events, you can, do all this, all these freeze dried foods. It's actually pretty amazing how extensive the, allowed food options are.

[00:22:12] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** it really is. I will say there are still limitations. You still can't without a commercial facility. You are still very limited on your meat and that kind of thing. So if anyone is looking to get into a cottage food business, the first thing I would do is there are educational workshops. To teach you about the cottage food law in Oklahoma.

[00:22:39] They're very in depth. They're put on by OSU. When I attended, there was someone who was a microbiologist. And we're learning about food safety from them. We're able to ask questions. There was a home canning specialist.

[00:22:54] you had all the specialists in the room with you. And it was fantastic because you could say, here's my specific situation, here's what I want to do, what do I need to do? And they were very, very open and forthcoming with, okay, here's what you're allowed to do.

[00:23:12] You're good on this, you're good on that. Make sure you're doing, all the right things. And they're very encouraging. But they would also say, okay, if

you're going to do pet food, if you're going to do things that are meat, you're going to have to have the commercial facilities, you're gonna have to be more involved with the U S D A.

[00:23:31] But it was. they're, they're exceptionally helpful

[00:23:36] **David Crabill:** So dried foods have become very popular, especially the freeze dried candy.

[00:23:40] It's definitely a business that's working for a lot of people. But the biggest hurdle is the cost, right? The investment of the machine, which you already had. But what did you actually have to invest to get one of these machines?

[00:23:57] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** So I believe the first unit that I purchased was around \$4,200, and I will say, That was even shocking to me.

[00:24:09] And I have also acquired four more. It is a significant upfront investment. There's also what you have to consider is your electricity and your packaging, things like that.

[00:24:22] The for one, like my first unit was a medium. It really wasn't significant. There may have been a 30 to \$50 a month increase, which wasn't horrible. it was really hard for me to go out and spend a little over \$4,000 on a product. In a process that I wasn't super familiar with, and I think now there is a lot more information.

[00:24:50] It's a lot more popular. There's Facebook groups, social media groups dedicated to it. I get people, who contact me and ask me questions, which I love. so now it's like there's this whole big community out there and I think it's grown significantly in the last few years. And honestly, I'm going to say I'm very heavily biased, but when people ask me if they should buy a freeze dryer, I am almost always going to say yes. I know for some people that that cost is a big thing, but if it's something that you are able to do and it's something that you are interested in, I think it's something that people can use them in so many different ways. I've talked to parents who had children with, medical issues and conditions where diet was a very difficult thing to navigate outside of the home of dietary restrictions and, and allergies and sensitivities.

[00:25:54] I remember talking to the gentleman and he was telling me about his daughters and he was like, should I get one? And it was like, yes, absolutely get

one. could now, Freeze dry meals, freeze dry snacks. They know what's in them. They can travel. They've got food with them.

[00:26:11] They're not having to sit there and dissect what they can get, from a menu or a fast food restaurant. got things that they, with them that they know are safe and prepared, up to their standards. I just think there's so many, so many uses to freeze dried food.

[00:26:30] **David Crabill:** On top of the cost. I think one thing that might hold people back is just, it's such a foreign thing, right? They've never seen a freeze dryer before. They've never used a freeze dryer before. It seems like it would be a very complicated process, like how easy or complicated is it to use a freeze dryer?

[00:26:50] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** It's very simple. It is a matter of, you prepare whatever item you want to go in there. You slide the trays into the unit. You set you want the temperature to be as far as drying. there is a, touch screen on it where you can control things such as the freeze time and the drying temperature. But for the most part, the unit does all the thinking for you. So it's a pretty simple process I know for me it's kind of to the point where I can put items into the machine I'll hit start and it will, cool for about 15 minutes before I can put items into it. I've got my items prepared by then.

[00:27:34] I put them in the unit. I make sure that there is an air valve on it I make sure that's closed and I hit continue and I walk away. It's going to go through the freezing cycle. the vacuum drying cycle. It's gonna go through an additional drying cycle. It's do all that on its own.

[00:27:52] You don't. super into how it works. You don't have to be a scientist to figure it, out. it really is kind of a set it and forget it kind of process I guess, for lack of a better way to say it. as you do different items, you'll, you'll learn, and I will say I have learned from messing up a few things.

[00:28:14] Fruits and vegetables. You don't want to dry those at higher temperatures. want to dry those at lower temperatures to retain all that good nutrition. You don't want to, try to speed up the process by increasing that temperature. You wanna go kind of low and slow with those because you can actually. Almost, I guess, scorch the product a little bit. Like I royally screwed up some strawberries and some watermelon by trying to run things at a little bit high of temperature. And when I say scorch, like very slight discoloration for me. it just tasted off. It wasn't anything absolutely horrible, terrible.

[00:28:53] It was like, okay, that's not the thing to do. I've learned from that, and I should have known better. I should have known, okay, probably 130, 100 and below would've been far more, reasonable for fruit. But it was one of those things where I simply wasn't paying attention.

[00:29:08] Candy, you run a, a much higher temperature because you want all that good, gooey sweetness to be at a higher temperature, get the caramel soft, get everything so that when the kicks on, it really pushed it up in a nice, fluffy, poofy fashion. it was just one of those things I rushed and I messed something up. I also learned to, when I'm processing ice cream, to set the free cycle, let it go a little bit longer. It's fine, because you really want things like ice cream to be super frozen, super solid when that vacuum pump kicks on, because if it doesn't, that ice cream is going to try to fill that chamber. And I will say it has happened to me.

[00:29:50] And the first time I was absolutely just shocked. I was just absolutely like, oh no, what have I done? but at the same time, it was an excellent opportunity for me to learn how to clean my machine and get very familiar with all the different parts that you can, take off, pull out, clean, how to get into all those little nooks and crannies, you know, which should you need to.

[00:30:19] you know, what ended up starting off as a, bit of a fiasco ended up being very educational for me.

[00:30:26] **David Crabill:** Now what about like the processing time on this? Because especially for someone who's thinking of maybe putting out that investment for a business, you know, like they have to be aware of like, how much is this gonna produce and how long is it gonna take? So like, what is the processing time on these things and how much are you actually able to produce in an hour or a day or whatever?

[00:30:54] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I know that some people have different methods because that's the other thing is everybody kind of has their own method of doing candies, especially What happens with candy a lot of times is you will start off, you'll run a full cycle and you'll do something called piggybacking.

[00:31:12] And basically it's the cycle's done, but the unit gives you an opportunity to add more dry time. And so you can pull out that initial set of trays, put a new set of trays in, add more dry time, and it skips a couple, the, like, the freezing and, and, some of the, the initial process of a full cycle. So it's a little bit faster, for me personally, to ensure that my stuff is, thoroughly dry.

[00:31:36] I dry my candies for a minimum of eight hours. There's some that I like to process for as much as 24 hours just to ensure that everything is dry, that there's not any chewy or, tacky spots in it. When you get into fruits and vegetables, your time is going to substantially.

[00:31:58] it's not to run a tray of strawberries. I'll run them for about 24 hours, but I typically add an extra 12 to 24 hours just to make sure that any moisture that's still retained within little seeds and things like that, that we get all of that out of the product so that it doesn't end up, affecting the texture later on.

[00:32:21] Pineapple for me, 48 to 72 hours. It is not a fast process. This is not something that you're going to pop in to the freeze dryer be done an hour later. that's one of the reasons I have purchased additional freeze dryers because there's more and more demand for fruits and vegetables and that kind of thing, as well as the candy.

[00:32:45] The candy I can run typically two loads a day, with the fruits and veggies, that's something that when I load that unit, I know that unit's going to run a day or two. that's just what that item requires. you can't really get in a huge rush. it's definitely not a microwave.

[00:33:07] It is something that you learn to be more patient with.

[00:33:11] **David Crabill:** Yeah. Well, so that helps explain why you have invested in what, another four large freeze dryers. So you've poured, I guess, well over what, \$20,000 into equipment at this point, right?

[00:33:26] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** Don't, don't say that, that, that sounds like a huge number. But I will say that wasn't an instantaneous thing. when I started selling candy at first I put that away I kept it and it's like, okay, I want. My freeze dryer to be in a temperature controlled, humidity controlled environment.

[00:33:48] And fortunately my husband and I are both like do it yourselves. we took half of our garage. we created a freeze drying room, and I've got, cabinets and counters and, you know, flooring. And, bit by bit we kept, okay, we've got a room for it, it's temperature controlled, it's, when I, pull candies out, it's not in a humid environment.

[00:34:10] I have more control over the process. And then it was, well, let's get another freeze dryer. Maybe we get a large one this time because it's twice the

capacity of the medium. Okay, great. So we did that, And the demand it stayed ahead of my capacity.

[00:34:26] And I was like, okay, well I'm gonna have to get another one. when we initially did our, our first freeze dryer room. We maybe took a quarter of our garage initially and it was like, oh, we're gonna have to redo this. we went ahead and expanded it to half of a, two car garage. So it's a much bigger room now.

[00:34:45] but it's one of those things where I haven't really been out of pocket. I've reinvested my time and, earnings back into that. And that's covered, building the room, our additional units the freezer because I needed freezer space because there's also a local farm market Ruzycki Farms that, they asked me, Hey, Can you freeze dry elderberries?

[00:35:11] initially it was strawberries. It was like, Hey, they were only open on weekends, and they're like, we're getting batches of, strawberries. And if they don't sell, they're gonna be gone. they're not gonna be viable by the next week. Can you freeze dry these? So it was like, yeah, I can freeze dry strawberries, no problem.

[00:35:28] it was one of those things where I needed to have freezer space and capacity so that I could keep taking on different tasks and kind of keep up with. The different demands that the community was starting to bring me. I've been very fortunate that, I have done well enough that it's continued to support itself because it's a hobby I love, it just happens to be profitable.

[00:35:54] So I couldn't really ask for anything more.

[00:35:58] **David Crabill:** So you're not only, getting your own products or buying your own candy and freeze drying them, but you're also, it sounds like, essentially, Selling the freeze dryers as a service, right? You are having contracts with people or whatever so that you're freeze drying for other people as well.

[00:36:15] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I've done some collaborations because it is a big upfront cost and maybe it is something that, They don't think they're gonna use it all the time, or it's just not in the budget. And that's fine. I get it. you can only do what you can do with your budget. it's one of those things where the first collaboration was with strawberries and it worked out fantastic because it was, kind of, we did something called working on the haves.

[00:36:43] If I bring you 10 quarts of strawberries to freeze dry, you can keep five quarts of them when you're done. And I get this five quartz back, now. It's shelf stable, it's packaged I can sit it on the counter, customers can buy it, they can throw it in their car.

[00:36:57] It's great little snack for road trips, things like that. still eating those strawberries that were raised locally and sold locally. for us, it just kind of made sense because at the same time I was starting to struggle with how do I source things?

[00:37:15] It's one of those things where when you start off as a small business, it's like, okay, this is fun. I'm doing this. And then you start getting a consistent demand and you have to start looking at it as more of a true business.

[00:37:28] And you have to figure out where can I get all the different things I am going to constantly need? Where can I get them at a, an appropriate cost and timeframe? And, it worked out for me to have really fresh, locally grown food available.

[00:37:47] **David Crabill:** Well, I was just thinking about this concept of you renting out your machines, because I constantly have people telling me that they wanna start a freeze dried business, but they're not sure if they should invest in a freeze dryer. And I hadn't really even thought about the possibility of them potentially renting out a freeze dryer just to test the concept from somebody else locally.

[00:38:05] So that's an interesting concept, but if somebody is like sold on, I'm ready to get a freeze dryer, which one should they buy and how big?

[00:38:16] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I am going to say, whatever size you think you will be happy with. Pick the next size larger. I now have purchased three different sizes of machines my first machine was a medium I it was fantastic until I got a large, and a large would do double the capacity of a medium in almost the same footprint.

[00:38:41] There's not a really significant change in the footprint of what's sitting on the table or on the counter and okay, great, you I'm getting double the capacity now, so I, I'm super excited and then I bought an extra large. that's been my latest requirement and I will say it is. really big.

[00:39:01] You really have to look at. What are you running? What do you think you're going, to run the most of, if you're looking at candy, I'm going to tell you Bigger's better because you wanna be able to put a lot of product in.

[00:39:15] You don't really go so much by weight when you're running candy because you have to allow a lot of space for it to expand and, and kind of get that nice puff to it. If you're doing things like fruit and vegetables, you're probably more concerned with the weight so that you're not overburdening the machine, which is going to cause the machine to have longer processing times and, things like that.

[00:39:41] And it's just you really wanna stay within the guidelines of the machine so that you don't have any issues. If people are asking me what size do I think they should get, I'm gonna say, depending on the size of the, of your family, of what your intent is with it, you're really gonna have to sit down and, and, figure out, do I need to worry about weight?

[00:40:03] Am I more worried about the size capacity? it's one of those things, it's gonna be to each their own. But I, would encourage if there's any doubt you're torn between, I don't know if I should get, this one or maybe the little bit bigger one. I'm gonna say almost always lean towards that bigger one because you'll catch yourself using it far more than you initially think You will.

[00:40:26] **David Crabill:** Is there a certain brand of freeze dryer you'd recommend?

[00:40:31] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** For years it's pretty much Harvest Right. has been it. they're based in Utah, Salt Lake City, I believe.

[00:40:39] I really love mine. I haven't had many issues. Yes, I've had some issues, but to me it's like anything else. It's with the amount of wear and activity, I've always had very good luck with their, tech support. always had a good quality product. I think I did have to have one return that was delivered. Maybe it was damaged in transit and another one shows up and it's perfect. I'm a big fan of the harvest, right? Because that's, what was available. That's what I've used, There are more brands coming out that I am not as familiar with, it's one of those things as always, anytime you're gonna put out, a substantial amount of money, you want to do your research, you want to see, if you buy directly from them, then there's a warranty If you buy it from a retailer, make sure that, you know, understand when the warranty starts, it should start at purchase. I, I don't know exactly, as opposed to, buying maybe a used machine

and maybe that warranty doesn't transfer, you need to make sure you understand what you're getting into.

[00:41:47] **David Crabill:** I think one of the biggest challenges for someone starting a business is you make this big upfront investment, right? But then that's not a recurring cost, and you have to factor that into your pricing, right? I mean, these items are definitely much higher price than a normal, you know, bag of produce or even dried produce or candy.

[00:42:14] so how have you, you know, sort of factored the pricing of the equipment into the cost of your product prices over time?

[00:42:23] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I will be honest and say on my first machine, I really didn't do a lot of that at first, I still have a day job and I end up doing a lot of cost analysis type work. And I finally sat down and did a cost analysis of, here's how much more my electric is, here's I'm spending on labels, here's what I'm spending on bags, my time, here's you know, what I paid for the unit.

[00:42:56] And it does add up and I've kind of just implemented a flat rate for my items where there's, of course, yes, there is still profit. But it's also one of those things where Initially, I started selling at a lower price point. I didn't have all of these things factored in and I went and I did that.

[00:43:18] And I was very, very worried about the cost. Will people be willing to pay that? And I happened across a marketing article. It explained that a lot of consumers equate cost with the value. So if you are selling at a cheap price, people expect a cheap product.

[00:43:37] If you are selling at a higher price, people are going to assume that is a higher quality, more desirable item. It was a very ironic twist for me that when I did take all my cost into account and I did raise my prices and I made sure that I was covering everything, I actually sold more and that was kind of a shock to me.

[00:44:01] So yeah, you do have to take into consideration your time, your effort. I have an LLC, so I'm very conscientious about track of all my costs and my mileage and having everything ready to do on my taxes and things like that. it kind of, in a way, becomes all encompassing.

[00:44:22] you really end up learning everything about running a business. except for I don't have any employees. I'm my own employee, so it's been kind

of nice to not deal maybe with that part, but it's really giving you a perfect opportunity to look at all the financials and how all that works and how it goes hand in hand with the marketing and how can you market and what are people willing to pay?

[00:44:49] what are you willing to invest as far as time and money?

[00:44:53] **David Crabill:** so what did you start selling your products at and like what are you selling the mat now when you increase the cost?

[00:45:01] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I started selling my items at, \$6 or \$7 a bag. it almost felt like an odd price point too. Because, after I kind of reevaluated everything, saw what, cost I had into the product and what time, you know, you have to pay yourself.

[00:45:20] You have to account for your own time because it does hold value. I increased the price to \$10, but when I did that increase, I also included my state sales tax that I pay. it made it easier for my customers. It's a \$10 purchase. There's no tax. It's easy math. Here you go. When I am out selling at events, we typically will do \$10 a bag or we'll do three for \$25.

[00:45:48] So it does give a cost break. I'm still making a profit on that, but it also entices people to buy more. And when they buy more, they tend to buy a variety. They tend to start wanting to try them all. It's one of those things where it's kind of paid off to give that third bag kind of bonus for me.

[00:46:11] **David Crabill:** So you're saying you charging \$10 a bag, but I'm thinking about You have a lot of different products, a lot of different candies. These candies are at different price points. You're doing fruit. Not only is, you know, fruit expensive or at a different price point, but also you mentioned how much more time it takes to process fruit as compared to candy.

[00:46:33] So like, are you charging \$10 a bag for. Everything you do or do you have different prices depending on the product that's in them?

[00:46:42] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** Pretty much because my bags are different sizes, so what I've done is I've adjusted my quantities accordingly and the bag size accordingly to my price point, as opposed to adjusting my price point to having everything one size. The other thing is like some items puff up really big.

[00:47:05] They're in a much bigger bag weight wise. They're not going to weigh near as much as say, something like Skittles, which is, are still gonna be significantly heavier, but I'm gonna put those in a smaller bag because that's a smaller item. It's more condensed in that bag, more compact and you're still getting a good amount.

[00:47:25] I try to give, my customers a good amount of product I see a lot of folks who do the freeze dried candy thing and the price points are lower, but some of the bags are, pretty small. And my thing is, I've kind of stuck to my price point because I want people to walk away with that big bag of candy or, it's a decent sized bag of fruit.

[00:47:48] Hard for people to wrap their heads around how light freeze dried items are. most of the items lose, between probably 75, 80 5% of their weight on average.

[00:48:02] you end up with exceptionally lightweight items. But when you freeze dry fruit, it still retains the same color, same shape, same size. When you see the bags, you see that it's, you know, a good amount of fruit in there.

[00:48:16] But the other thing I really love about freeze drying is all of the fruit that I process, it's fresh fruit.

[00:48:23] I'm not buying frozen items. I'm buying seasonal fruit. to get the best price point and the best flavor, and the absolute best come from the freeze drying process for my customers.

[00:48:39] **David Crabill:** just looking at your products on your Facebook page they look like, you know, nice size packages, but you have chosen packaging that is clear on the front, right? So you can easily see. What is in the package? Was that something that you learned over time or was it just your intuition that customers really needed to see the product?

[00:49:03] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** That was something I did from the very beginning because if you can't see it, it's kind of hard to wrap your head around what you're getting. And when we go to events and we have a booth and things like that. We hand out samples. We put the product in our customers' hands. We want them to try it and see if they like the texture.

[00:49:29] Personally, that's the best part of all of this is watching that wow look of a piece of candy that they've popped in and it's the same flavor. It's this candy they're really familiar with, but it's a whole new texture. It's a totally

different experience. if you're going to do candy, you have to assume not everyone is going to be familiar with it.

[00:49:53] You need to show them how it's not chewy. the difference in texture, how it's changed and let them experience that the flavor is still just as fantastic produce as the regular chewy kind.

[00:50:05] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like you've been selling a lot of this stuff. Now you said you're selling at events. I know you've rented out your machine, in essence, and where else are you selling it? How are you getting this into people's hands?

[00:50:19] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** The first retailer I picked up, who literally started it for me was my friend Diana. unfortunately, her business is no longer in existence. And then Ruzycki Farms approached me around Christmas time and said, Hey, we wanna sell your candy.

[00:50:37] And it was just like, oh my gosh. they're, they're popular around here And so I started partnering with them, so I now have three consistent retailers. right now. We're focusing more on like the wine festivals and things that go on here in Oklahoma I still do a lot of the different craft fairs and things like that, but it's nice that I don't feel like I need to do every single event.

[00:51:06] I think it's one of those things where there's kind of room for everyone. Because not everyone is gonna have the same selection. Everybody's gonna kind of put a different twist on it. Really it was just word of mouth for me.

[00:51:20] I've been approached by people I haven't really had to go out and really push to get into places, which is, I mean, I am very fortunate in that respect.

[00:51:31] a lot of the initial events I did, it was, people reaching out saying, Hey, come do an event. That's something that we really look forward to because my husband does go with me and we will have a booth we hand out samples, we meet a lot of great people, we get to watch their reactions to the different products and it's been absolutely fantastic for us.

[00:51:53] It's, it's been a great outlet. not only creatively, but getting us out more into the community.

[00:52:00] One event that stood out very much for us, it was a Halloween event at a neighboring town. and part of it was bring candy to pass out for trick or treaters.

[00:52:12] So we attended, really not expecting much because literally every vendor there is going to be handing out free candy. So we walked in, just kind of wanted to see how we would do, how it would be received. I would've never predicted within an hour and a half, we were completely sold out.

[00:52:32] We were absolutely inundated with customers, and it was just kind of an odd experience because I'm like, there's literally free candy all around, but people love the freeze dried candy, so they were happy to pay for it.

[00:52:46] **David Crabill:** I feel like a lot of the people who come to me thinking about starting this kind of business, they want to sell it online, and especially considering the weight of the product. Seems like a perfect shipping product would be very inexpensive to ship. Have you sold it online? Have you tried shipping it?

[00:53:06] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I have not. I've been hesitant As far as shipping, because some items are pretty fragile, especially some of the candies. for me to retail it locally, sell it local events, and I even deliver directly locally I feel I have more control over how it's handled. And so I haven't gone the whole shipping route yet.

[00:53:33] **David Crabill:** so you said you have a job and you, accidentally kind of fell into this business. What keeps you going and, and keeps you wanting to continue to grow it?

[00:53:47] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** For me it's a creative outlet. My mom and grandma were fantastic cooks. I love cooking, I love food. And my dad he was an engineer, so he was very logical, very practical.

[00:54:02] And he also had a very heavy influence. Like all my electives in high school were science classes but both of my parents were depression eras. So we had the big garden, we raised cattle. We hunted, we fished, they were very much on the home canning and, putting things away I grew up with that before we were calling it self-sufficient.

[00:54:25] It was just the way it was. But to me it's also kind of that perfect blend of the cooking, culinary side of it, playing with flavors, seeing what you

can do with textures and playing with that whole, science. I guess it brings out my inner science nerd.

[00:54:45] It makes me happy to sit here and, and talk about the sublimation and, the different things that you can do and, and how it all works. And, and I end up with a physical product that I get to watch people enjoy. And yes, it does bring in a profit, but it's, one of those things that I think even with the profit, if it wasn't something I truly enjoyed creating, I don't think I could stick with it.

[00:55:12] for me it's that creative what can I do with these different candies? can I add, tajin and hot sauce? Can I kind of spice it up? Can I give people sweet and sour and salty? I have to be a maker or a producer of something. I mean, even before the freeze drying, it was, the home canning.

[00:55:31] It was my garden, it was. I guess in a way I, it's really, I'm kind of striving to more or less return to the way I was brought up and that self-sufficiency, and this is one of my ways of doing that for myself.

[00:55:47] **David Crabill:** Well, it's clearly been pretty lucrative for you. As you look forward into the future, where would you like to take the business?

[00:55:58] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I am currently trying to take it into, a healthier direction because. I keep gaining capacity so that I have the ability to run more fruits, more vegetables, more things like that. One of the things I would like to get people to think about is, you know, we talked about selling services and, and that kind of thing is we are in Oklahoma, we are in tornado alley. People have tornado shelters. Most people have water and things in those shelters. Have an emergency kit of food. Have something that, you know, will meet your dietary needs if you have a special dietary requirement or if you're, diabetic, you're trying to avoid sugar or whatever it is, I would like to get into more. That kind of preparedness, I guess.

[00:56:55] **David Crabill:** Can you see this business eventually becoming a full-time thing for you?

[00:57:00] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** I will say it will absolutely be a full-time job for me at some point, I feel that I am laying a very good foundation for something I can carry into retirement. are always going to.

[00:57:15] Want to preserve food. going to, want to have snacks. I mean, they're consumables. it's not like, you buy one bag and you're done. it's candy, it's fruit,

it's things that you eat and enjoy and then you want more of it, and then you wanna share.

[00:57:30] I see this definitely being an ongoing demand. wanna keep exploring different ways of, of using it. And I wanna get into maybe more of the locally grown. Seasonings and, freeze drying, locally grown herbs and things like that.

[00:57:47] And maybe people wanna put together their own spice blends. I mean, I don't think people are going to want to give up that once they start experimenting and, and being able to buy these items and know exactly what's in them

[00:58:02] I think people are starting to take more interest into what they're putting into their bodies and there's more concern about what are we really eating? And I think this is a lot of people wanting to kind of take that control back into their own hands. And I think it's fantastic.

[00:58:24] **David Crabill:** Well, Janna, thank you so much for sharing all that good advice with us. Now, if somebody would like to learn more about you where could they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:36] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** You can actually find me on Facebook at Janna's Freeze Dried. I'm also on Google under Janna's Freeze Dried. Both of those, you're able to contact me. It's got all my contact information. I am always open to emails or messages or texts or even call.

[00:58:57] I'm all for freeze drying and definitely I try to be approachable and I love to answer people's questions I'm happy to assist with almost anything.

[00:59:07] **David Crabill:** Well, awesome, and thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:12] **Janna Newcomb Walworth:** Well, thank you for having me.

[00:59:14] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast. For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/93.

[00:59:26] And if you're enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be a long review, but it's truly the best way to support this show, and will help others like you find this podcast.

[00:59:38] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground to get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

[00:59:51] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.