

It's A Marathon, Not A Sprint with Robert & Paula Grosz

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 Robert and Paula Grosz.

[00:00:11] 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's website, and I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a totally free website in less than one hour.

[00:00:37] 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 for most cottage food businesses. So if you want to learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to forrager.com/website.

[00:00:55] Alright, so I have Robert and Paula on the show today. They live in Murray, Kentucky and sell jams and jellies with their cottage food business, Whisky Ridge Farm.

[00:01:05] When they started their farm in 2015, they planned to sell micro greens and other produce, but after a couple of years they learned that their value added products, like jams, jellies, and pickled items, were both more popular and profitable.

[00:01:20] After a few years of significant growth in 2021, Robert and Paula finally decided to take the leap and go full time with their business. But then a few months later, the Ag department told them they could no longer sell pickled products, wiping out a huge part of their business.

[00:01:39] But they adapted and have made their business work on jams and jellies alone while also investing a huge amount of time, effort, and money into building a certified manufacturing facility on their property that will finally be ready to use later this year.

[00:01:55] There aren't too many people that have scaled a homemade jam and jelly business like Robert and Paula have, and this episode is packed with tons of insights they've learned from their unique business journey.

[00:02:07] And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

[00:02:11] Welcome to the show, Robert and Paula. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:16] **Robert Grosz:** Well, thanks for having us

[00:02:18] **Paula Grosz:** We appreciate it.

[00:02:19] **David Crabill:** All right. Can you take me back to when this whole journey got started for you guys?

[00:02:24] **Paula Grosz:** Yes, we used to sell vegetables and plants at the farmer's market. Robert was really great at growing things. And then we used to also supplement and buy vegetables at the Amish auction. And Robert called me at work one day and said, the wheel on our truck literally came off and he wasn't able to go get vegetables and I had promised the people at the farmers market that we would be there that next morning.

[00:02:48] So I swung by the store got nectarines limes came home, stayed up till in the morning making jam so I made nectarine lime watermelon and watermelon lime jam and I already had a roaster red pepper ketchup. That we had and I got up at five that next morning and went to the market and I made as much money that day as we've made all the other weeks and I didn't have to come home and process fruit and vegetables and I came home and told my husband we're done selling fruit and vegetables.

[00:03:12] We're going to start making jams and that's how we got started with like 40 jars.

[00:03:15] **David Crabill:** And what year was this?

[00:03:18] **Robert Grosz:** About 2018. I think we're starting our fifth year now. But we had been going to the farmer's market maybe three years before that. We actually started out cause I have a love for hydroponics and I try to do hydroponic herbs as kind of a side hustle. And it went over like a lead balloon here in Western Kentucky.

[00:03:32] So, so that's kept our journey, but we liked the social aspect of the farmer's market is pretty fun.

[00:03:39] **David Crabill:** when did you guys start the farm?

[00:03:43] **Robert Grosz:** 2015, I think right after we moved here from California, we had bigger vision for it. I thought like I said, I love hydroponics and, and I just thought it would be fun to have. You know uh, sell bib lettuce and, and hydroponic strawberries and things like that. And we actually built a greenhouse and did all that kind of stuff, but it just, it was a different marketplace. The, the Southern marketplace is a lot different than what we had in the Western coast. And it, it was one of those things that it just was we were working way too hard for too little money. So it just was one of those things that we just thought, well, we know where we can get. Inexpensive vegetables and started making relationships with people that actually grew it. And then we're reselling it for a while. Like I said, just to get started,

[00:04:21] **Paula Grosz:** And he was doing micro greens and people just were not understanding it where now micro greens are really big up in Paducah and they're starting to pop up in Murray here. and then we also had a lot of animals we had a lot of chickens and goats and sheep and all of that. And we sold our eggs.

[00:04:36] **Robert Grosz:** we had big plans, but we got sucked into the jams and jellies and, and that consumes most of our time now, that's for sure.

[00:04:41] **David Crabill:** you started actually selling the jams in 2018, and that, I believe, was the year that Kentucky got their cottage food law initiated. Was that just. A coincidence or did you actually know about those laws and started selling because of that?

[00:04:57] **Robert Grosz:** we knew about it. I saw it coming. There was the lady that started the laws here or helped get it pushed through. I think she was actually from Missouri and was frustrated that the Kentucky state laws were so heavy handed and they're still pretty heavy handed as, you know, when you compare it to like a Tennessee or a Montana or something like that.

[00:05:15] But yeah, that allowed us and we were one of the first ones to apply. we did the jams jellies the first week on a whim and then, uh, you know, immediately, applied and got the licensing. And at that time, all it was, was an informational thing where no fees and things like that.

[00:05:28] And you could do anything within the state of Kentucky even ship in the state of Kentucky at that time. And things have changed a little bit now, but the nice thing is, is there's no oversight or really any licensing here other than just a, now an annual fee that allows you to make your stuff from your house.

[00:05:45] **David Crabill:** So I know you do jams and jellies and you do a few other things on top of that. Um, what exactly do you sell? Not in terms of what else you sell, but also in terms of what flavors you sell?

[00:05:57] **Paula Grosz:** We do seasonings as well. We do dried seasonings. Um, I tease Robert because he loves to bring out hotter and hotter stuff, but he can barely eat above a bell pepper. So we do a lot of like ghost pepper seasonings and habanero seasoning. Smoked jalapenos, our newest one that came out. We were doing pickles until we found out we were not allowed to do pickles unless we're a federal food manufacturer.

[00:06:19] And we've been working a year and a half on getting that licensing. But we do quite a variety of flavors. we probably have 35-40 flavors right now on our product line and we continue to bring out more as we can. it's kind of cool because we try to make new things when customers give us ideas or things will pop in our head or we'll trip across some beautiful fruit and we'll be able to turn it into something.

[00:06:38] And then sometimes we're just trying to play catch up on just trying to keep enough, you know Apple butter or apple pie bourbon or jumble berry. Those are some of our top ones, you know, trying to keep up with our, big sellers, but we're really looking forward to getting our pickled products back.

[00:06:52] **Robert Grosz:** When things started rolling on the jam business, we actually sat there and I go, honey, we need to come up with a new flavor every single week for the farmer's market.

[00:07:00] And she just about fell over because at that time she was working a full time job. I was, you know, making money in my ways and we're like, how are we going to do this every week? But it was one of the one or two things that we did that were just absolutely instrumental. In our business because people would bring us ideas as the things that they'd want that maybe they grew up with or they haven't seen in a long time.

[00:07:21] And then we do the research and come out with it for a while.

[00:07:24] and then the other thing too is, is, you know, like going to nascar, you wanna see the wreck and turn four, they would always stop by the farmer's market to see what, we came up with this week. You know, and just, just to say hi, and, and see what it was and sample what's what we did. So,

[00:07:37] **Paula Grosz:** And sampling's key sampling is definitely key.

[00:07:41] **David Crabill:** So what are some of the most unique flavors that you've come up with so far?

[00:07:47] **Paula Grosz:** Well, today we're making purple whole pea jelly. And that's made with the outside of the holes that you throw out in the in the compost. In fact, last year we made it because someone told us several years ago they had it at their wedding as a wedding favor. And I thought, I've never even heard of this, and my farmer called me last year twice saying, let me make sure I'm understanding you wanting the part that I'm throwing in my compost and I said yes that's exactly what I want, and we already had five or six requests Just this year alone saying please bring that back.

[00:08:13] We've done prickly pear. Someone here in Kentucky actually had them growing in their yard. Our number one seller is apple pie bourbon.

[00:08:21] we've made so many different kinds.

[00:08:23] **Robert Grosz:** Yeah, frosted carrot cake is one of my, I call it happy in a jar because everyone that ever tries it goes, Oh my gosh, that is so good. one that this last weekend was the big one is we did a corn cob jelly. it's those kinds of weird things.

[00:08:35] I'm trying to think of some of the other stuff that

[00:08:36] **Paula Grosz:** Strawberry margarita. That's a huge seller. People love that one, strawberry lemonade, and we really try to do a punch, a big flavor in there. So when we say it's going to have strawberry lemonade, it is definitely going to have lemon, because I do lemon juice, lemon zest.

[00:08:48] I try not to do anything muted, And we do them lower sugar for the bulk of our product line. So we really try to make sure you get that fruit flavor first because we don't want to be known as just one that puts a ton of sugar and stuff.

[00:09:00] **David Crabill:** Well, the. Tricky thing with canned goods, especially if you're going low sugar, right, is safety. I know you guys are hyper conscious about safety. So you're having these recipes tested?

[00:09:12] **Robert Grosz:** It's not required by the state of the cottage food. And you said low sugar and low sugar is a no, no. We can go lower sugar. So what we try to, you know, express to people is that I try to, within the guidelines of the state, get as much fruit in the jars as we possibly can, because where the flavor is.

[00:09:28] **David Crabill:** Now you also said that you have alcohol in some of these jams. Are there any licensing requirements for that?

[00:09:36] **Robert Grosz:** I want to tell this story,

[00:09:38] **Paula Grosz:** I know. I'll let you tell

[00:09:40] **Robert Grosz:** so, so Here's the thing. We went out to a show in Aurora and they got rid of their blue laws. So they were legal to do alcohol. Well, we had somebody report us to the state of Kentucky for any food product with alcohol in it. So, of course, we were extremely nervous.

[00:09:55] The state instead of looking at the complaint, they actually forwarded on to alcohol, tobacco and firearms. Now, do you know what it's like to get a call from the A. T. F. saying that you can't make moonshine and jam jars? So I spent probably two weeks reading studies about it. talked with the different people there and in food products, including cottage foods.

[00:10:16] Now, this is Kentucky, California may become, you know, completely different. We always thought the limit was 1% alcohol. So a 1%, you know we're always below that, but that was my mental limit. Well came back from them and talking to the head of the Department of Agriculture here in Kentucky.

[00:10:34] And he says, no, Robert, I got off the phone with the ATF. You can go up to 5% in food products. I went 5% is beer. He's like, yep, it is. So you can do that. And I said, and you're sure that it's legal here with what we're doing. And I'm like, he's like, absolutely. So every time someone gets worried about alcohol and foods, it's like, we've gone as far as you can possibly go. So.

[00:10:56] **Paula Grosz:** and we don't put alcohol in there just to put alcohol in there. We really do use it for the flavor

[00:11:00] in there. Like I do a piña colada jam and it's beautiful on top of a English muffin, or even on ribs, but we did one without the alcohol and it, barely sold

[00:11:09] **Robert Grosz:** And that kind of leads into something else too. This week we'll do four farmers markets. but at the farmers markets, you see the same five or 600 peoples.

[00:11:18] Every week. Okay. One, it, it allows you to make a relationship with them, but like for our apple pie bourbon, even if someone will say it's a gimmick, well, it's the same people that are coming and buying it the second, the third and the 500th time. So it must be a good product. You know what I mean?

[00:11:33] And, and it's extremely important for farmers markets or areas where you're going to see people over and over and over again, that you have a high quality product, even if you have to charge a premium for it. Otherwise, if you have a, a marginal or. low end product, you're just, you're not going to succeed, I don't think.

[00:11:49] **David Crabill:** So what percentage would you say of your customers at the markets are recurring?

[00:11:54] **Paula Grosz:** Depends on the market. So my market is much more locals. I have a much more relational. do have visitors that come, but again they're usually tied to somebody that lives here, and we have here in Murray, Kentucky, we are probably the biggest market in probably five or six counties. Roberts. Market is very different.

[00:12:14] He's up in Paducah, much, much bigger city, but his is probably we're guessing his is 50% tourists. So our sales are very different. In that respect, so his is more transactional and minor more relational I see a lot of the same people every week come back. That was just different and then same with the other two markets that we do.

[00:12:31] those are still building so a lot smaller,

[00:12:33] **Robert Grosz:** We jokingly say with our family, they all help us out here in the first few weeks, because when we open up for the farmer's market in May it's almost like working at a grocery store.

[00:12:43] The customers know what they want. They know what they like. They, as long as we have it in stock, they're gonna buy it. And it's, it's literally like working as a checkout clerk. But if we go to life, I go to Paducah and I have someone who has never even heard of me before

[00:12:57] have to go through and explain to them why my product is better than what they might get locally or why it's different. And that's where the sampling and the sampling, the products really, really comes in is because when they have that doubt, then I can put them in their mouth and they're like, Oh my gosh, that's the best X, Y, or Z that I've ever had.

[00:13:14] And that builds the customer base. And then that helps your sales and your revenue per sale too.

[00:13:18] **David Crabill:** Robert, at the beginning, you mentioned that you. Thought that selling micro greens or selling produce was going to be more lucrative than it was, but it was going to be a lot of work and not enough profit. Actually, that's sort of what I often think of when I think of a jam and jelly business. It's a ton of work and for is lot of work. a lot of people not a whole lot of profit But it sounds like you're doing a lot of business. So can you just talk a little bit about how you've made this work? Like with the pricing or just the financials.

[00:13:53] **Robert Grosz:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. You know, we started and we did 40 jars our first week. Okay. And for the first two years, my wife had a full time job and I was doing stuff on the side, just, you know, doing whatever we do. And we were able to go every weekend and we went from 40 jars to like last week, I think we did almost 400 jars.

[00:14:11] In a week, it takes a while, you know, it's like rolling a rock uphill. You gotta get over the crest before it starts to take off. This is basically what, you know, somebody told me or I read about it Basically 30% of whatever you sell your product for 35% of, let's just say a third, 33% is the cost of your goods.

[00:14:32] So whatever we put into the goods, the jars, the fruit, the sugar, the whatever it happens to be, needs to be about a third of what you do. Then a third is the cost of marketing. So it's the cost of driving to the show. It's the show fees. it's the shirts that I have to buy That says, you know, grab your balls.

[00:14:47] It's canning time, whatever it happens to be to go and pit up that show or do the tents and things like that. And then, on the other one, hopefully you were, you walk home with about a third on the backside. Um, in the

beginning, making 30 or 40 jars was a lot of work, you know, and, and it is a lot of work for anyone that's ever canned before.

[00:15:05] But like my wife, I think last week, didn't you do over 200 jars just by yourself?

[00:15:10] **Paula Grosz:** We did 800 jars in four days.

[00:15:13] **Robert Grosz:** So, I have to do things like labeling and chasing shows and things like that. And, and she does most of the cooking. So, given that it's, it's about scalability too. So, you know, um,

[00:15:24] **Paula Grosz:** He now buys the jars by pallet, so he's able to get it cheaper. But I will tell you quite honestly, we live very, very lean. we don't have a lot of extravagance on that. And so we take as little from the business as we can in order for us to keep going. And we try to dump it back into the business.

[00:15:37] But he has been excellent at finding, like, Our kitchen is concrete with stainless steel, just about every single piece inside there except for one is used. And he's found them and done amazing work on, building that kitchen out with a very limited budget.

[00:15:52] **Robert Grosz:** now we have a set amount we take out of the business every week, cause we got bills to pay too, just like everybody else. But what I see a lot of new people doing that get into cottage food is they have a great weekend and they think that they just they had a great weekend.

[00:16:04] So I can take a bunch of money out of the business and that's not how it works. You know, we'll take 500 bucks out a week or whatever happens to be. And if we have a great weekend, we might take a little bit more. But generally, even if we have a monster weekend, like we go to barbecue on the river, or we're going to the state fair where we'll do a thousand jars, you know, in three or four days, that's a lot of canning.

[00:16:24] Yeah, you get a big old check, but you know what, 50% goes right back into the business on day one. And I sit down like today on Monday and figure out, okay, what do I need to do to stay ahead of the things we need to do? Do I need to buy pectin or do I need to buy lids or do I need to chase fruit today or whatever it happens to be?

[00:16:41] **David Crabill:** So I definitely agree that your goal in most any food business is to get your ingredients to be about 30% of your price. But, tell me if I'm wrong, but a lot of people who are starting out a jam or jelly business, they're not anywhere near 30% when they buy their fruit.

[00:17:01] **Paula Grosz:** Yeah, no, you're right. Because you're starting at a smaller limits. If you start building relationships with different farmers and sometimes when you go up to scale, like what we do you're able to start getting them at lower prices. There's some things I've just told customers flat out. I can't make right now because I can't get that fruit at a good enough price like cherries.

[00:17:19] We haven't sold a cherry product in 2 years because I can't pay. five to six dollars a pound and put that in a jar. I just can't. There's just no way. and I've been very honest with my customers. I'm not going to give you a garbage product.

[00:17:30] I'm not going to go out and change my recipe in order to, you know, fit the module. I'd rather just not bring that product out at this moment in time because I want to keep my quality up. So just recently, A local guy called me and he is selling me his blackberries, but it's at a price that I can put in a jar.

[00:17:45] And it's a price that makes him happy because last year he threw out half of his harvest. so I agree with you, the home canners it's harder, or if you're just starting out, it's harder. So I would recommend if somebody is just getting started in this business, look for a fruit that you can get at a cheaper price, check around and see there's somebody local go on Facebook or Instagram or whatever, and say, does anybody locally have this kind?

[00:18:05] Like. pears. That's a fruit that I usually have to tell people. No, I got plenty of.

[00:18:09] **Robert Grosz:** There's a perfect example of this, too. For example, during COVID pineapples were extremely hard to get.

[00:18:15] Um, We could get them fresh, but they didn't taste right to us. So we started looking at frozen alternatives and I know that sounds a little bit like cheating, but we were finally able to find A flash frozen Hawaiian organic that tasted really good. And, you know, it's organic. So we're paying through the nose for it, but I know I've got a good product. And I, think, you know, garbage in garbage out, good stuff in good stuff out. I think that matters. You know,

there are certain things as we get bigger and this is, you know, for those considering, you know, making it a full time job.

[00:18:45] It's really hard to get enough strawberries from a local guy. You know, I used to be able to have three guys that would grow jalapenos for me and they'd bring me 10 pounds and we'd be able to work it out. Now, you know, we're, we're processing, like we just got a hundred pounds on Saturday

[00:18:59] **Paula Grosz:** from a local farmer.

[00:19:00] **Robert Grosz:** a local farmer because we, we fostered that relationship long term.

[00:19:04] So yes, I agree with you. But even when we first started, I believe our, cost was somewhere between 40 and 45%. Um, my wife calls me cheap. Sometimes never cheap with my, my fruit. Okay. My ingredients, but when it comes to things like labeling or jars, things like that, I go, okay, that's a good price, but then what?

[00:19:23] So, I'm able to buy jars by the pallet because I made phone calls and I can go and I can spend five or 600 on a pallet of, jars, drive down to Memphis, pick them up, bring them back. And that saves me a significant amount. I'll save 30% on this, on the price of my jars. And that helps get my price point where it needs to be.

[00:19:42] Because if you want to go to the next level, you're going to want to be in stores and stores have to make money too, which means your margins have to be right.

[00:19:49] **David Crabill:** So while we're on the topic of jars can we talk about the pandemic a little bit?

[00:19:54] **Paula Grosz:** that was hard.

[00:19:56] Robert Grosz: We called it the jarpocalypse, so.

[00:19:59] **Paula Grosz:** We were very blessed. We even told customers like we can't find jars right now.

[00:20:03] And we were struggling trying to fill some of them. And so. We actually had customers bring me jars that they would find in their cabinets and so I, of course, sterilize them.

[00:20:11] **Robert Grosz:** one of the cool things that we also did even before the customers really started digging in and buying stuff when they Wouldn't see it on sale and stuff for us is we pay 50 cents a jar for any return jar

[00:20:22] so they'll bring me jars that I can can in and we'll go ahead and wash them and sterilize them and then recycle them through the system.

[00:20:28] Oh, Paula, what about the one that we got a call from a friend of ours?

[00:20:32] **Paula Grosz:** Yeah, we got a call from a friend of ours, and when we got there. It was this huge facility full of jars that were probably 10 years old and they were filled. so we ended up buying the whole collection.

[00:20:44] It probably was three or 400 jars worth.

[00:20:46] **Robert Grosz:** Oh gosh, it might have been two or three thousand. I don't know. It was a lot.

[00:20:50] **Paula Grosz:** I don't, it was just so much. We spent weeks sterilizing, you know, washing them, running them through with Clorox and then, you know, running them through our, our big sterilizing thing.

[00:20:59] but that helped us too.

[00:21:00] **Robert Grosz:** almost everything's made in China now. and during the pandemic, because shipping rates that, you know, and everybody was staying home, China had its own things.

[00:21:08] And then in the U S like, where I get my jars now that are American made they couldn't have enough staff to run the stuff. So they could only do certain things, the home canner on the glass market is the last one. that they're going to take care of.

[00:21:22] But what I've told people in the past is that the heat of the market is, July and August for, canning supplies. And. The retailers know that and they will mark up the prices on it when you get it locally. um, I always tell people, if you really are a canner or want to make this as a business, you need to be looking at October and April to buy as much as you can to get you through this season, because that's going to be difficult to get the glass.

[00:21:48] **David Crabill:** So we haven't talked yet about, like, what do you actually price your products at now?

[00:21:53] **Paula Grosz:** So our four ounce jars is now 4 and we had to go up on our eight ounce jars. Those are now 8. We used to do a jar that we got that was like about 11 ounces. That used to be 10, but we had to eliminate that sizing. And that's another thing with jars that they eliminated that jar actually. So we've gone just to the standard four ounce, eight ounce.

[00:22:12] And then hopefully when we bring our pickles back out, we'll have those in pint size jars. I'm guessing we'll do that at eight or nine dollars a pint.

[00:22:19] **Robert Grosz:** interesting thing you know, about the pricing too, everybody thinks that there's a magic price. but It's not about price because if you're fighting about price, then your product's not good enough. I'm never going to be able to beat Smuckers ever. And if someone needs directions to Walmart to go get cheaper jelly, I'll, I'll show you how to get there.

[00:22:38] but ours is a premium product and like, especially for those that are listening that are. Thinking about getting into cottage foods. There is no magic number that you can do we have three or four bakers at our markets Everything is different because the product is different and people try to think that okay If I just go from five to 475 that'll increase my sales by x no It won't it really really won't you need to have a good product that has value and that's the thing if you try to sell A low quality made from juice out of Walmart kind of jelly that tastes kind of bad for 8, you're not going to win ever.

[00:23:14] just make sure that you make stuff that you like, you give it high quality, and then you just price your time accordingly, no matter what.

[00:23:22] **David Crabill:** So you said you sell the 4 ounce jars for 4, the 8 ounce jars for 8 but not all fruit is equal, right? Some fruit's more expensive than other fruit, and also, some fruit is harder to process. So are you really pricing all of your jars exactly the same regardless?

[00:23:41] **Robert Grosz:** Yes,

[00:23:43] **Paula Grosz:** And part of it is it's hard to keep up with different pricing for different jars. I mean, maybe someday we'll have to go to that, but again, I also won't make something if it's outside of my guidelines to know that I can't, I'm going to lose money on it. Like we just brought back out nectarine

lime jam was one of the first jams I made was the first jam we made to start the business.

[00:24:03] I just made it last week. And when Robert looked at how many jars I made, he said, wow, that's one of the most expensive jams are making right now because it's, it's lower in sugar a lot of hand processing and same with our Merlot jelly. We don't make that one right now because it's so expensive to get the Merlot that we utilize.

[00:24:17] So, yeah, we do to pricing all the way across the, cause it's just easier for our customers to, we one time brought out black raspberry. And that one we did price \$1 higher on the large jars. I only made it large jars because it was so much more expensive, but it was one of those where we knew we would never see black raspberries again.

[00:24:35] And our customers understood that. There are certain markets that will sometimes get pushback. But I just tell them, I'm sorry, this is the price, as it is. I do a premium product. and I understand everybody has a different budget. and if they're going to really push you on it, that's when you just go, I'm very sorry.

[00:24:49] I wish you well, you know, with whatever you purchase and let them roll on because you're not going to please everybody. And your product's not going to be for everybody.

[00:24:56] **Robert Grosz:** the trade off is this like in the farmers markets, because that's where we do probably 80% of our sales through the year is that farmers markets, there is a crunch time, usually between nine and 1030, where, and especially Paula all by herself. She's just. Crushed. when you're trying to sample and sell and all that kind of stuff, when you have 30 or 35 different products, knowing the pricing, setting out all the price tags, having all correct, it's difficult.

[00:25:24] It's very, very difficult. So you know, there are certain things like a strawberry or even apple pie bourbon apple pie bourbon. Yes. It's got bourbon in it. And bourbon is not cheap. You know, we, we spend hundreds of dollars every month on, on alcohol that goes right up the chimney. But what we find is apples are relatively inexpensive.

[00:25:41] So as a net net, it tends to come in. And I think apple pie bourbon for me is about 32%, but there's other things like the blackberries, the blackberries I'm closer to 40%. But I would rather have that product ride that horse as long

as I can to get the customers that really, really love it so that they come back next time.

[00:25:57] Like I said, with the NASCAR and the turn four, to see what else is new that I can make it work. Oh, there's nothing peaches. There was a freeze in the South this year. It took out probably 90% of the peach crop. We'd drive down to Alabama or South Carolina and actually physically go to the farm and, drive them back.

[00:26:14] I can't do this this year. So our peach products we tried some of them. Yeah, they were not great peaches. So we made peach butter. uh, But I won't do my peach bourbon or peach preserves and things like that. So that is where I'm really kind of a stickler for quality.

[00:26:29] It's just not going to work and I'm not going to buy slop and I'm not going to go down to Walmart, you know, cause that kind of stuff is terrible and we're big enough, we can't do that anyway, but, but still It's really important that you focus on doing the things that you like to do. And then you get high quality fruit, because if you try to fake it, your customers will look, they'll, they'll find out, especially when you've got farmers markets and they're coming back next week,

[00:26:50] **David Crabill:** So can you give me a sense for like what the low end costs would be for buying fruit from the store versus what you're getting directly from farmers and buying in bulk?

[00:27:02] **Paula Grosz:** So I bought a hundred pounds of jalapenos and they were 90 cents a pound is what I paid my farmer asked for. But he is selling them at the markets for 2 and 50 cents a pound.

[00:27:13] **Robert Grosz:** Normally farmers. will sell to you at whatever they would sell their wholesale price to. So if you can make a relationship with someone, normally they'll, do that because they'd like to see it go to you instead of going to, you know, a Kroger or Walmart where it'll show up on the shelves in, a couple of weeks.

[00:27:29] To give you an idea, anything that we have to get, let's say, for example, mangoes, mangoes are not in Kentucky. I have to get them off a truck. I'm basically paying the same that you would buy a mango at Walmart or Kroger. So we don't save any real money that way. But when we have the gentleman in Mayfield that calls us and says, you know, I'm going to have 300 pounds of blackberries, you know, I'm like, yeah, we'll, we'll pay you 50 cents a

pound for that. No problem all day long. But then, like I said, with apples, apples are more like a dollar a pound.

[00:27:58] You know, raspberries are like. 6 a pound cherries are seven or 8 a pound. And I, I can't make the math work on that kind of stuff. when, you know, you have half to three quarters of a pound of fruit in a jar after you process it and skin it and do all that kind of stuff,

[00:28:12] **Paula Grosz:** But like we will, we'll buy like plums do not grow locally here in Kentucky. So when we can find them at a certain price and, and I just know in my mind, Robert, and I've talked about it, that if the price is, is a certain amount, I know I can go ahead and buy them because I know it's going to fit in our model.

[00:28:26] Otherwise, if it's over that, I just got to roll on

[00:28:29] **Robert Grosz:** it reminded me of we happen to actually be shopping at our local grocery store and they had quince there and quince are like oranges, but for the Mediterranean. Okay. They're really thick skinned uh, and, and they're very popular in Europe. Well. He couldn't sell them.

[00:28:43] **Paula Grosz:** He was selling them for five. I think it was 2. 50 a quince. I said, I, I can't put that in a jar. And he said, what price would put him in a jar for you? And so I said a lot lower than that. And so he popped back 50 cents a quince.

[00:28:55] And I said, I'll buy them all. And so I took every single one of them that he had plus what was in the back because they've been sitting there for a week and a half and he hadn't sold a single one of them, he said, sometimes you just got to ask, and I've done that where I walked up to a farmer and said hey look I'm really interested in your habaneros

[00:29:08] and not only my interest and I'm interested in. Every single one that you have, you give me a different price if I bought every single one on this table? And they say, absolutely. because they wanna get rid of them. They don't wanna go home with habaneros they're gonna be picking more next week.

[00:29:20] **David Crabill:** So it's obviously a unique business model cause there's a lot of seasonality to it. You're dealing with different. Fruits and produce across the year, but what about you know, from a consumer side, do you see seasonality there where like what are your high seasons? What are your low seasons?

[00:29:40] **Paula Grosz:** So we, um, and in my little silo store that we have, because sometimes we don't have markets during like November and December. I mean, we do, but they're kind of hit and miss. So we sell a lot out of there right during the holiday season. And so we'll see customers coming through, especially like the week before Thanksgiving, the week before Christmas, they'll start coming out.

[00:29:56] So we do see a high point in that. Of course, in the middle of summer, we find that our markets are very, very busy. Some of them start in March, but most of them start about April, May. We're busy all the way up until right about now. And then they start dropping down because people aren't as excited about going to the market.

[00:30:12] They've been going for a month or two, and then they start picking back up September, October, because now they're excited about pumpkins and fall. So you kind of have a slow down during the middle of July and August. And then again, you pick back up before the holiday season because people are excited about buying stuff for the family.

[00:30:26] **Robert Grosz:** We travel, you know, because we do this for a living now and have now for just about two years exactly. And, during the off season apparently the electric bill has to be paid every single month. And so. We, we have to chase shows in bigger towns that are inside.

[00:30:41] Cause we don't have a farmer's market to go to. So we'll go to Louisville or Lexington or, or, uh, you know, shows that are in convention centers and stuff like that, and be able to sell there. Like if we can get them to sample the product in a town that they don't even know of, you know, off season, then we can sell enough to do it. But we're just trading water in the wintertime and the early spring. We do pretty good, uh, the first 10 or 12 weeks of a farmer's market.

[00:31:03] And then like, Paula said, it's a, it's a slow slide until the fall and then I also tell people that, you know, here in, in August and September and part of October, we may not be at the farmers markets because we're chasing bigger shows.

[00:31:15] Cause we've got to fatten up. And before we go into hibernation in the winter time, but, uh, yeah, it's very, very seasonal and you got it, but you got to adapt. That should be the key to whatever cottage food people are doing, whether it be bakery or whatever

[00:31:28] **Paula Grosz:** Well, and our, customers are seasonal too on certain flavors. Like I've learned like strawberry lemonade sells super well at the beginning of the season and when it's hot. And I think it's because they see strawberry lemonade, drinks all over at these shows and events. And then all of a sudden people start coming to you and they're, they're starting to look for like apple butter, cranberry.

[00:31:46] So, you know, we're rolling into that time of the season. It is very seasonal about what they're cooking as well.

[00:31:51] **David Crabill:** so you mentioned you've got this silo store on your property and that's super, super deep, unique. And you also, I saw have the silo trailer. I mean, I've never seen anything like this. Can you talk a little bit about these?

[00:32:07] **Robert Grosz:** the silo store itself, it's an eight foot silo. Basically it's step on its feet. I cut the bottom off and then put it on an Oh, just a stand out there it's heated and air conditioned. So it's big enough for one person to shop in it at a time. And we have all of our jams and jellies out there and they can come 24, 7, 365.

[00:32:26] The reason that we did the silo is that we were looking for a way, you know, cause our sales were getting enough where I was getting phone calls all the time that says, Hey, we want X, you know, can you bring it to me? Well, I'm not going to drive 35 miles to drop off two jars of jam. It's just not going to happen.

[00:32:42] So I needed a way to sell off season. So my wife and I got on Pinterest and we saw this. A silo that had been made into like an a building, you know, like that you can go and do a workshop kind of thing.

[00:32:53] And I went, Oh, I can do that. So I found one in Arkansas and went down and picked it up, brought it up and, cut it into pieces, put a door in it, put the, heating and air conditioning, put some lights in it and stuff like that. And it's, it's honor pay. So the people just come up, they do their shopping and they leave the money in the, I say, leave the money in the tree because the pay box where the pay box is.

[00:33:13] I would say it's probably 10 to 15% of our sales especially in the wintertime, summertime, not so much, they know how to find us, but that one worked really, really cool. And the other thing too, is that we haven't been able to identify any theft and that was my biggest concern when you've got a couple

thousand dollars worth of products sitting out front you know, and it's, yes, it's on our property, but it's 60, 70 yards from the house.

[00:33:36] So it's, it's not like something where I can go, oh yeah, you know, I can see you and things like that.

[00:33:40] **Paula Grosz:** But we're, we're also seven miles from town. So it's not like we're in the middle, we're in the heart of town. And if they're going to drive out here, they're not going to steal from us.

[00:33:48] **Robert Grosz:** We're from San Diego. It would never work in San Diego. Trust me, it wouldn't, it wouldn't do that. but here it does seem to work.

[00:33:53] And, the other thing too is we have some poverty in East Murray. Well, during COVID, when the kids got kicked out of school, I'm like, man, I can afford to drive in to go get homework and I can go in to go and data plans and all that kind of stuff for, for But these kids can't.

[00:34:08] So I actually in the silo store, I put in wifi and I made it free for anybody that wanted to come and use it. So there were a couple of mornings before early morning shifts. I'd look out and there'd be three cars parked out there and, and they were downloading homework. We also offered to print homework for any kid that needed it in the area.

[00:34:26] Just tell me what you needed and I'll print out, you know, we do thousands of labels. What's another couple sheets of paper, you know, for, some kid to be able to do it. And when we did a post on that. It went viral. And when I mean viral, it's like 50, 000 shares. And I spent three days of my life saying, sorry, I can't ship.

[00:34:43] I can't ship because it's not legal. You know, Australia, sorry. Can't ship, you know Ireland, I can't ship. But it's also spurred something here in the local community where churches went, Hey, that's a good idea. I'm going to do that too. And then there's about 15 locations where someone can go and download stuff and, and use free wifi here locally.

[00:35:02] And I know that sounds like a simple thing, like you get it. But, you know, here locally, I think it was uh, McDonald's is the only one that had it. Anyway, we got known as the Wi Fi silo jam and jelly people. So when you talk about our silo trailers um, we have a single wide, which is basically the top of a silo.

[00:35:20] On top of a trailer it kind of looks like a picnic table turned sideways and cut in half and I, I sell from that in Paducah and then it works so well because at farmers markets, I don't have to send up a tent or a table or anything like that.

[00:35:33] **Paula Grosz:** It doesn't blow away.

[00:35:35] **Robert Grosz:** So it, it, it goes at and it's very recognizable.

[00:35:38] So people know that when we're in an area and then, so we did my wife, a double wide, so she takes the, she takes the double wide down to Murray and it goes over from there. So,

[00:35:47] **Paula Grosz:** And mine has a silo on it as well. But then it also has a roof over it on the other half. So one half is a silo one half is like covered. It leaks like nobody's business so we don't, it's not waterproof. So if we're in a rainstorm, it helps a little bit but yeah.

[00:36:02] **Robert Grosz:** It was a unique marketing thing that we just said, looking back now, let's not do the short route. Let's do something neat. And then we did the effort with that, and it's turned into now silo of one way. The other is going to be part of our business, I think, forever, just because it's just, it works so well.

[00:36:19] **Paula Grosz:** And Robert truly is the only one that had the vision on that because none of us could see it. He really, and he just kept staring out there in the middle of the snow going, I can see it, I can see it. And I kept thinking, what is he thinking? But he did a great job with it.

[00:36:31] **David Crabill:** it's so unique and recognizable. And I was going to say, if you ever redo your logo, you got to put a silo on your logo for sure.

[00:36:39] **Robert Grosz:** Yes, absolutely.

[00:36:41] Absolutely.

[00:36:42] **David Crabill:** So now I know you guys are looking ahead to the state fair coming up here soon. I have you done it before? I mean, that's a huge event.

[00:36:51] **Robert Grosz:** no, we haven't. the state fair is an 11 day event. And it's 12 hour days, most days plus, you know, whatever time to restock and stuff.

We're spending almost 2, 500 to go because we have a double spot. So that's like 1, 100 each plus electricity. It's, it's expensive. don't get me wrong, but there's over half a million people that come by.

[00:37:10] So, you know, that's why we decided to do it.

[00:37:12] and, you know, numbers wise, you know, for some of the people that we've, that we've seen is that, yeah, it costs, you know, two or 300 a day in expenses to be there, but you'll sell, you know, a thousand to 1, 500 to 2, 000 with a product every single day.

[00:37:28] **Paula Grosz:** We were hoping we're going to have shipping by this point. We were hoping to be at that level, but We're hoping that when we finish coming from this event, that we won't be far from being able to ship. So that way we'll have a bigger market that we've reached.

[00:37:39] **Robert Grosz:** Yeah. And one of the cool things is the guy, Marty, who's in charge of the vendors and stuff there. He called me because I was getting nervous. He goes Robert, we just want to invite you to the state fair. He said, we really couldn't have it this year unless whisky Ridge was there. I laughed, of course he said, no, no, I'm, I'm being serious. We have, Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of vendors every year.

[00:37:58] And there were eight or 10 that were really, really excited about having here and you're one of them. And, and he said, go ahead and pick your spot, whatever you want to do which was really cool because that acknowledged that he's had our product or heard about our product and that he likes the way we market with our silo trailers and our silo and the way we're trying to do and, and how we started from nothing, you know, 40 jars.

[00:38:19] you know, in cottage food. And here we are, within weeks, hopefully to make the next step to become an actual processor, where we can ship and do that kind of stuff. So,

[00:38:28] **David Crabill:** Well let's talk about that next step a little bit. I know you guys are in the process and have been in the process of building out a kitchen, but first I want to just ask you because I know you used to do pickled products used to do acidified foods And you've stopped doing that did you ever look into the microprocessor law in Kentucky?

[00:38:50] **Robert Grosz:** So I have spent dozens of hours on conference calls and stuff, because what happened is, we thought it was legal because we were

seeing pickles at all the farmers markets all the time. we thought it was okay. And then the health department showed up and said, no, you guys, you can't, you can't do this.

[00:39:04] So we killed it right there, but here's the thing we were told. And the guy, like you said, says, Oh, all you have to do is go and take a microprocessor class. I went, no, that's not my understanding. He said, no, here it is right here. And he showed me it. And this is my local health inspector guy. Okay. And I said, no, that's not what I did.

[00:39:22] So I got on the phone to the commercial food manufacturing, and then we conferenced in. Another guy that does the eastern part. And then we called also and talked to the head of the Department of Ag. And what they said is no, absolutely not. Pickled products those acidified foods have to come out of a factory, basically a certified factory.

[00:39:41] So you can have tight controls on the things that are necessary to keep people safe. And also that we can get it back if something goes sideways.

[00:39:49] **Paula Grosz:** Robert's actually called other facilities that are licensed you know, like a commercial kitchens and he'll say, can we rent the kitchen with your license? So, and they said, Oh yeah, unless you're doing a pickle product.

[00:39:59] **Robert Grosz:** we're so close to being approved from a federal standpoint. I'm not kicking over any trees anymore, but it's it frustrates me to no end that the local health department Versus the state health department versus the department of Ag. They're on different pages.

[00:40:14] and being that we travel throughout the state, we also find that if I do sampling in Murray, it's got to be at a farmer's market. They won't let me do sampling anywhere else. Not even with a food truck permit, which is what I have to get in some other counties, other counties, I just need to tell them what I'm doing to sample my products and that's okay with them.

[00:40:30] And they have no problem with that. If I go to a Louisville or Lexington. Then I have to get inspected and have a three compartment sink and all the things that go along with it. So it, depends. And

[00:40:39] if you're considering, doing cottage foods and things like that you need to talk to the people, but you need to talk to the right people.

[00:40:45] And, and normally in my experience, the local health people don't have the innate understanding of all of the laws necessary because David, the pickles was half of our product line. So we killed that in one day. And I actually sat here and looked at uh, we made a thousand jars.

[00:41:01] Okay. a thousand jars is 4, 000 worth of revenue and we had just made them. Well, they sat in my garage for a year. So, and, and, you know, I don't know what I'm gonna do with them, but it's, it is what it is. So sorry, this is a passion for me. I get, frustrated with it because every farmer's market we go to, or show we go to, there is someone selling pickles and I'm like, and they do not have licensing.

[00:41:22] I know they don't have licensing, but nobody does anything. And, and we were told by the health department that, well, we don't work on the weekends.

[00:41:29] **David Crabill:** It's just interesting because I mean I just rechecked the law and as I had understood, you know the law It literally says, it spells it out and says you can do acidified foods, acid products, formulated acid products, you can do low acid foods even, like it literally says that in the law.

[00:41:49] it's happened. a number of times in different states where the Ag department is opposed to the laws as they're written and will do things that are, you know, that, that are basically illegal.

[00:42:01] **Robert Grosz:** I'm not doubting what you said. I, if you've looked at the state line and you, Look at this in different states. That's fine, but I, I have gone to and died on this hill already. And, and at this point we're already \$25k or \$30k into this and, and within one electrician or getting it done. So I'm not going to rock any boats. That's for sure.

[00:42:19] **Paula Grosz:** They've also shut down other businesses that we know of in the local area, we know a lady who does teas and she has to do it at the federal level as well, where she has to track everything back.

[00:42:29] **Robert Grosz:** Here's the funny thing too, We have been told by the state of Kentucky home cottage food under the home processing license that we have that you can do teas.

[00:42:37] so here it is. Now we've got, once again, two different sides of the same, same, coin.

[00:42:42] The one thing though, David, we're talking about the nitty gritty with here, but I think that in general people, cause I help our home baker group in Kentucky a lot, every day I'm, I'm helping someone with something don't let.

[00:42:54] What we're saying stop you from trying to build your business because look, you'll learn your business and you can spend, you know, we spent so much time planning our business, but it was a silo store with wifi in it that changed our whole direction. And now I'm making silos on the off season, you know, to tow behind a truck to sell jams and jellies.

[00:43:13] So you never, never know, just do your best. contact the state person that, that oversees this, get the information when you can get it in writing so that if somebody disagrees with you, you can say, wait a minute, I, I got this piece of paper that says something different, you know that keeps you out of trouble and just go to work because you can't.

[00:43:31] You can't learn these kinds of cottage food businesses without doing the legwork. You really, really can't. It's not a magical combination of, of pricing and ingredients and all that kind of stuff. you got to hoe the row. You gotta do the work, otherwise you won't learn what works and what doesn't work, despite your, even the best planning.

[00:43:50] **David Crabill:** so let's, talk about what you've learned with this kitchen buildout. I know you've been working on it for a long time now. What are some of the things you've learned and the challenges you faced?

[00:44:01] **Robert Grosz:** So, one of the things is that we're, we're in the east part of, of Murray, Kentucky, and we're on a well. Our water is perfect, but we have to meet federal water standards to a level that we could literally sell it to our neighbors.

[00:44:15] So we spent a thousand dollars on a water test and um, we worked with the state And look, the state is really nice. The people are really wonderful. Don't get, don't get me wrong. It's just the way it's set up is just really weird. It took us 10 months to get our water approved after we had the test done and it basically came back and he said, Nope, everything's perfect on your water.

[00:44:33] It's wonderful and great. All you gotta do is chlorinate it. but um, that's one of the things where the sense of urgency is difficult. you submit something to the state and, and this. Goes into the nitty gritty part again, but you submit something and then they've got 120 days to respond. I run a business, you know what I mean? I can't wait 120 days for you to tell me, you know,

something, or like in this case, their, their payment processing thing didn't work for several weeks and then they lost my paperwork twice and you know, that kind of stuff.

[00:44:59] So it goes from there, but the kitchen itself, like, we've got the, you know, got all the plumbing done and the plans, all the plans have to be submitted through and approved for this through the state of, Kentucky. Well, the plumber was willing to go to bat for us. And what did he say to us, Paula?

[00:45:14] **Paula Grosz:** said it was actually out of he's worked with them for I think 20 or 25 years and he said it was the toughest plan he ever got through. He couldn't figure out why it took so long and he answered more phone calls and more questions from the state than any other plan he's ever submitted. Oh,

[00:45:27] **Robert Grosz:** our facility is a finished two car garage. It's 550 square feet. we're not talking about some ginormous facility where I'm going to take on Smuckers or Hickory farms or something like that. It's small, you know, but it's got to meet certain guidelines and, and, you know, it's a little frustrating because what happened is like the plumber we got through, we got a guy that was willing to help us out. It still took four or five months.

[00:45:47] **Paula Grosz:** it took six months. We started in January and it got approved mid June.

[00:45:51] **Robert Grosz:** And I'm sure other people will have better experiences than we do, but it was, it has not been fun.

[00:45:55] And then just the expense to it, when you go to a commercial level, Everything's got to be stainless, you know, which is fine.

[00:46:03] We can do that. All the machines have to be right. Everything has to be on paper and written down. We had to survey our septic tank to make sure that it was a certain distance from the, from the water well, things like that. And then, we have to have six sinks. a three compartment sink, a produce sink, a mop sink, and a hand washing sink all for that little bitty facility.

[00:46:21] So there's an entire wall. That's just nothing but sinks. But, you know, that said, that'll allow us to go to another level and keep our business growing, which is what we want to do. And we like what we do. So, you know, despite we're, bagging on stuff here, it's, it's not that big a deal.

[00:46:34] **Paula Grosz:** I actually never wanted to make another jar of cowboy candy because it, it smells, it's hot,

[00:46:39] **Robert Grosz:** Cowboy Candy is a pickled

[00:46:40] **Paula Grosz:** Oh, yeah. Pickled jalapenos or candied jalapenos. And um, I can't wait to make cowboy candy. I haven't made in a year and a half. is my number one selling product when we had pickles. I just can't, I can't wait to make it now.

[00:46:50] But I can remember like one of the last times I made, I was like, Oh my gosh, I don't want to make this again. And now I'll do anything to make it.

[00:46:56] **David Crabill:** so when did you feel like you were ready to make that leap? Was it just once you knew you couldn't sell pickled items anymore? Or were you just ready to start trying to, you know, ship nationwide, et cetera, et cetera?

[00:47:11] **Paula Grosz:** We've always wanted to ship. Cause again, we could at the beginning the first year that they had it, it was from, from like July to December. And then they changed the law so that that January 1st, you can no longer ship.

[00:47:21] **Robert Grosz:** to clarify, that's shipping within the state of Kentucky.

[00:47:24] **Paula Grosz:** Yes,

[00:47:25] but now we can't ship it all even within Kentucky. It's not allowed so we've always wanted to go to that level. It was just one of those on the back burner because we thought we could do our pickles our business was growing, we are doing really well. And then when they said, can't do any pickles, it was literally like, it, ground us to a halt.

[00:47:40] So we had to say, all right, we got to start working towards back to that. Cause we want to get all of our pickle product back in our top 10 products that we sold that year. And at that time I had made 18, 000 jars and this is, I was still working part time originally are working full time and doing this.

[00:47:54] or I made 18, 000 jars. We sold 15, 000 of them. I'd quit my job and I've been doing this full time So I've been doing it for maybe less than a year. And I thought, you gotta be kidding me. I quit my job to do this.

[00:48:05] How are we going to survive? And thankfully we have been able to survive on jams, but we really want to get back to bringing all those products out that our customers know and love. I mean, We get asked all the time where, where are my spicy carrots? Where, where's our cowboy candy? Our okra? You know, all of the things we used to make.

[00:48:21] **Robert Grosz:** here in Kentucky also, we can only sell 60, 000 worth of product. and then we've got to go to the next level. Well, you know, if we talk about the percentages and stuff like that, that's for two of us working, you know, to live on 30, 000 a year.

[00:48:35] it'd be nice to go a little bit more than that. You know what I mean? And you've got to go to the extra step. And, and here's the other thing too. I mean, aside from the financial part of it is there are lots of people that have ideas for a salsa or a seasoning or a barbecue sauce.

[00:48:51] And when you first start in this business. It's overwhelming. It just absolutely just, it's bone crushing and, what we'll be able to do now, once we got this, even if it's a little facility, I'll be able to go and my friend in Paducah that wants to do a barbecue sauce, who's a, who's a chef. He can come and he can pay me a hundred bucks for the day.

[00:49:10] And he can go and he can make his stuff in here and, and I can, you know, certify it and make sure all the rules are followed and help him through that to help him build his business. Because I really think that's what the purpose of cottage food is. it's not for us to make a living or do a side hustle or to do oversight on grandma, who's selling cookies at a PTA meeting it's to help people get into a business that allows them to go to the next step so that the state of Kentucky or the state of California, the state of Missouri can.

[00:49:37] benefit from not only the reputation of that product, but also the tax revenue and the things associated to help the economy grow. I think that's what it's supposed to be for anyway.

[00:49:47] **David Crabill:** It's clear to me that you guys are just extremely service oriented, right? Do you feel like that is a requirement for running this kind of business?

[00:49:56] **Paula Grosz:** Not necessarily. No, I don't think you have to be service oriented. I think that's in our makeup as well. We are Christian so I think we have that in us that we do want to help people. So I don't know if you have to be service oriented but again I think we are

[00:50:08] **Robert Grosz:** I think my wife is being humble because she forgets some of the things with it. Like I got a call today. She loves our habanero jelly. I have one jar left. and it's a four ounce jar. Okay. So, What's my revenue on that?

[00:50:20] Maybe take home a buck. Okay. But she said, are you going to be at the market on Wednesday? And I said, yeah, I will. And she says, can you set that aside for me? So, you know, from a service aspect, yes, that 100% is stuff that we have to do. And

[00:50:33] if you live that and not fake it, I think your customers know that, and they'll keep coming back and they'll support you like even during COVID our sales plummeted, but there were customers that still came out.

[00:50:44] They didn't need jelly, but they came out and bought it anyway, because they knew they needed to support us.

[00:50:48] **David Crabill:** I mean, I've made jelly before, I know how much work it is. Paula, it sounds like you do the brunt of the actual processing of the food. I mean, don't know, does it ever get old? Like, it's just, it's just so much effort to create jams and jellies and uh, you're clearly just making a ton of it

[00:51:10] **Paula Grosz:** sometimes there's some days that I have to tell myself because it's easy if you're if you're working from home. To not get up off the couch, but that won't pay the electric bill. So there are days that I don't really enjoy it. You know, it's just, it turns into a job, but I will take doing this every day and, twice on Sunday over going back to some of the jobs I've had in the past.

[00:51:30] And so I look at it that I feel very blessed that I do enjoy it. but you're right when you get too much going on and it gets overwhelming. find myself when I get too busy and I'm making stuff that I don't get as creative, I lose that creative side of me and so I end up just making what I can.

[00:51:46] And then other times you know when it slows a little bit or it's the beginning of the season or near the end of the season is when I get my creativity back and then I get my excitement back and I look at recipes and so yeah you're right it can be a grind. Somebody actually um sent me a text.

[00:51:58] A vendor sent me a text saying she said she had made jelly for the first time in her life and she would never do it again. And I said, I understand it is a lot of work, but there's something about it. I, I kind of joke about it. I dream about jelly sometimes. I dream about flavors and I don't know.

[00:52:11] It's just something I just really love.

[00:52:13] **David Crabill:** considering the amount of effort it takes is this a kind of business that you recommend to other people? Like, if they're thinking about? Starting a jam or jelly business? Like, who's the right type of person to start a business like this?

[00:52:27] **Paula Grosz:** You have to have a passion for it. I really think that's number one. Robert asked me years ago, cause I used to be bank manager. I was kind of a numbers person. And he said, if you could do anything in the world, what would you do? And I looked at it one day and I said, I'd love to make jam and jelly. And he said, you're kidding.

[00:52:41] And I said, I just love it. and so you have to have a passion for it. And so if you don't, I think you would get burned out very quickly because it is a lot of work. and again, we built up so that I can make. Several hundred jars in a day, like my canner, my big canner that we, for the water bath, it holds 30 jars, you know, as opposed to where, you know, home canner may be holds eight, so we've had to work up to that, where we keep up with that kind of.

[00:53:04] Process. So if you don't have a passion for it, I don't think you'd enjoy it.

[00:53:07] **Robert Grosz:** I always tell my home baker people, I said, it's a marathon, not a sprint. and too many people get stuck in the Oh gosh, I need to have this, or I need to have this color on my labels. And I gotta do no, just make what you like, get out there and sell it. And then somebody will say something and that'll trigger something.

[00:53:25] And then you know, then you got a real business, but we did two years where we were both had other work that we did before it got to the point that we could actually pay the electric bill by selling jams and jellies it is definitely a, it's a grind, Mondays we do things like this podcast or I mean, you're our first podcast, but we do things, we, we chase fruit or we sit down and we do inventory and we, you know, make the deposit and all that kind of stuff.

[00:53:48] Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, we're canning or I'm out selling at a couple of farmers markets, whatever. Friday, we're usually labeling and we're loading the trucks and, getting everything to drag the silo trailers to the market. Saturday afternoon, we sleep because we get up at 4 a.

[00:54:02] m. it's not easy to do. And then Sunday, basically, you know, after church, we're laying around, petting the dogs.

[00:54:07] **Paula Grosz:** but it a lifestyle because again, like I can at least four days a week. The height of the season, like I know right now this week, I'm going to have to start at seven or eight in the morning. Sometimes I start earlier and I'm going to be going until six or seven o'clock at night. Now, not every week will be like that, but a lot of the weeks right now will, like last week,

[00:54:25] week, I kind of panicked a smidgen because I had 160 pounds of apples because I had to get some apple stuff done. so I made Robert stand in there and chop apples with me because I just, I had to get through it. But you have to have a passion for it.

[00:54:36] **Robert Grosz:** Yeah. And, and David, you know, for the people that are listening, that, that are just kicking us around in their head. you love doing something, whether it be baking or making candies or freeze died fruits or, or, or jams or jellies, whatever happens to be, if you have a passion for it, try it because you know, like farmers markets are kind of fun because there's a social aspect to it that you'd be able to go uh, you learn about and you see the look on people's faces when you come out with something new and someone absolutely just.

[00:55:00] Can't live without it. we had a customer um, we were in Louisville as a matter of fact. Uh, We happened to come back for the second time for the New Year's show. And she's like, I'm so glad you came. And we're like okay. We've only been here once, but okay. She's like, I was gonna drive to Murray, Kentucky four and a half hours away to come get some more of your habanero jelly.

[00:55:17] because I love it so much. So when someone says something like that, or, you know, my daughter loves your date jam, it's wonderful. I shipped some to her, you know, here and she just can't live without it. It keeps you going because there are times that you look at the checking account and you're going, oh man, you know, it rained this weekend and we made, you know, 600, 200 net.

[00:55:36] What are we going to do next week? You know, there are those times, but if you love it, get out there and try it. You know, do it and, and just do some research on the laws, get your licensing and, see if it's something that fits.

[00:55:47] **David Crabill:** you know, you've gone down this commercial kitchen route, right? But what a lot of canners do is they go down the co packer route Like I imagine you considered it and what did you learn?

[00:55:58] **Robert Grosz:** I am a stickler about quality. And when it comes to a co-packer I'm not a fan because I can't control what goes in there. It's about cost. if they're using, let's say uh, a pure cane sugar to do this stuff, that's made by ABC company and they find they can get it for 10% less from XYZ company, they're going to switch.

[00:56:21] Even though my recipes just says sugar. Well, that input could make a difference

[00:56:26] That's not to say a co packer couldn't follow your stuff exactly. But for the time and the expense and the energy, I would rather have the control here in my kitchen.

[00:56:35] And also if I want to work till three o'clock in the morning, I can do it. It's, it's not about sales as much as it is the creativity to,

[00:56:42] Now, other things like barbecue sauces or seasonings or things like that, where it's more. homogenous. I would probably be okay with that. But for my stuff, I want to be in control. If that makes sense.

[00:56:52] **David Crabill:** Well, you guys have obviously worked really hard to get to this point. You have a... Substantial business now and looks like you're right around the corner from being able to grow up much bigger So what are your visions for the future? And where do you see yourself going?

[00:57:07] **Paula Grosz:** We do hope to grow this to where it is a business that is day in and day out, it would be lovely to someday be the point where I do have a few employees. And I know that my children do not want to own this business so it's not something I'll be, I would be passing down to them, but I do hope it's a business that will continue, even if, even if I'm long gone, you know, someday.

[00:57:26] I do hope it continues on and that we can keep it growing like that.

[00:57:30] **Robert Grosz:** We've been really blessed. And I mean that in the truest sense, just with everything that's, come through and, I always joke that I'm, I'm going to take out Hickory farms first and then we're going to go after

Smucker's, but, uh, that's not really true. Uh, But it would be nice to be able to go and, I'm a service kind of guy.

[00:57:46] So it'd be nice to be able to have enough money and resources to be able to, you know, anytime I wanted to sponsor a youth soccer team, I could do it. Or if the rotary needs some money for, you know, do something like that. It'd be, nice to be able to go and, and just write a check on that. Um, like she said, she was a branch manager. I was a stockbroker and mortgage broker. We've made real money in our lives, but there's something about when you make your own stuff and people really, really appreciate it, that the money is not as important as the experience. And especially as you get older it's, definitely worth it.

[00:58:18] And, and if you can make a good product, if you really make a good product and you believe in your product, you're going to do fine.

[00:58:24] **David Crabill:** Well, thanks so much for sharing all that advice and I'm looking forward to seeing where your business heads in the future. Now if anybody wants to learn more about you uh, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:38] **Robert Grosz:** We're on Facebook at Whisky Ridge Farm. That's Whisky without the E. So that name was already taken. So we've got Whisky without the E and also kentuckyfreshjam.com. The website is terrible. You can't order off it yet, but once we do, it'll be reworked and we'll go from there, but that gives you an idea of where we're going to be, where you can come see us.

[00:58:57] And if you have any questions or advice about cottage foods, you're more than welcome to private message me or, uh, send us a, an email and I'd be happy to help us best we can.

[00:59:07] **Paula Grosz:** And we're also on Instagram under @whiskyridgefarm.

[00:59:09] **David Crabill:** Perfect. Well, thank you guys so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:14] **Paula Grosz:** Well, thank you for having us on. We appreciate it.

[00:59:16] **Robert Grosz:** Thank you so much, David. I appreciate it very much.

[00:59:19] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

[00:59:23] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/95

[00:59:29] 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 we'll help others like you find this podcast.

[00:59:42] 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

[00:59:54] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.