

# Mark Elvidge with Vermont Nut Free Chocolates

**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 Mark Elvidge. 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?

[00:00:17] 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 an hour.

[00:00:33] 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](http://forrager.com/website). All right, so I have Mark Elvidge on the show today.

[00:00:51] Mark and his wife Gail started their business, Vermont Nut Free Chocolates, back in 1998. At the time, they were the very first U. S. chocolate company to be completely nut free. They also chose to focus solely on e-commerce at a time when selling food online was very uncommon. Back then, Vermont was one of the only states which had a cottage food law, and they ran their small business from home for the first year and a half.

[00:01:19] They quickly grew and moved into a commercial facility, and they've expanded into larger facilities four times since then. Today, Vermont Nut Free Chocolates are sold in over 1, 000 stores and shipped around the world. Their current factory and storefront is located in Colchester, Vermont, and they now have over three dozen employees.

[00:01:41] On this episode, Mark shares their very unique journey of growing a small cottage food business into an international brand. And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

[00:01:51] Welcome to the show, Mark. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:55] **Mark Elvidge:** Thank you very much for having me, David. It's a pleasure.

[00:01:58] **David Crabill:** Well, Mark, I know you've been running this business for a very long time. you take me back to the beginning of your journey? How did it all get started?

[00:02:07] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah, so we have definitely been doing this for a little while. We started back in 1998, actually. And you know, the impetus for the, the idea behind the business to be a nut free chocolate company was that our son Tanner had a pretty serious allergic reaction to peanut butter when he was eight months old and we learned about food allergies as a need. It didn't really know anybody with any kind of nut allergies or peanut allergies growing up, or friends or family or anything like that. So it was kind of a new learning experience for us and quickly had to, figure out what we could have in the house that was safe for him.

[00:02:45] And what we needed to basically keep out of any kind of accidental exposure, kind of situation for him. So, my wife started researching, you know, everything from cereals to bread to all of the different foods that you'd, buy in a grocery store. And the, and the one that she had the most challenge with was confectionery and chocolate products.

[00:03:04] And, you know, didn't really want Tanner to miss out on any of the seasonal holidays or festivities throughout the year that chocolate is seemingly a pretty big part of. So she quickly, you know, started calling manufacturers and asking them what else they made on their lines and what else they packaged and what else they, produced in their facility.

[00:03:22] And back in 1998, you know, the food allergy awareness was nowhere like it is today. And companies were kind of blindsided by these type of questions because, you know, labeling wasn't in play or any of the awareness that we have today. So it became pretty evident that Chocolate was going to be a really challenging item for us to buy commercially that was safe for our son to have.

[00:03:45] So, she started making treats at home that would be sure of the ingredients and that, you know, he wouldn't have any kind of accidental ingestion. So it was basically just, she started making things in our house just for us. we would take it to family gatherings and parties and give it away as gifts and things like that.

[00:04:02] And then as more people raved about it and, repeatedly said, hey, you guys should, you should sell this, this stuff. It's really good. One day she came downstairs and said, you know, we should start a nut free chocolate company because I bet you there's hundreds of families in the same predicament as we are.

[00:04:17] And that was pretty much the idea and the start of, the business.

[00:04:20] **David Crabill:** So just to clarify, it's not that chocolate typically has nuts in it. It's just that all the manufacturers produced other things that had nuts in them.

[00:04:30] **Mark Elvidge:** Generally, correct. Yes. It depends what else they make in the facility and, you know, if there's a risk for cross contamination through either shared equipment or, you know, shared air or in the HVACs and systems like that, right? So raw chocolate by itself generally doesn't have nuts in it.

[00:04:49] But like you said, many of the manufacturers put a lot of inclusions in their, in their products and almonds and peanuts are, pretty popular in the confectionery industry. So that renders anybody that uses those products. In their process at all. Kind of risky for anybody who has a nut allergy to consume, because it only takes a little speck to have a pretty serious allergic reaction in most cases.

[00:05:12] **David Crabill:** All right, so you clearly had a need and other families did too. But as you said, there wasn't a whole lot of awareness back then of peanut allergies and nut allergies. I don't even think there was a need was a law that required companies to list allergens on labels. So. How confident were you when you started the business that you'd actually be able to have enough customers, right?

[00:05:36] Because that's the risk of starting a business like this that's so highly niched down.

[00:05:41] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah. So it wasn't really an idea to start a business that was going to be necessarily, you know, successful or viable over time. You know, my wife's primary purpose was, getting some. treats that were safe to some other families that, kind of wanted it. So we started in our home.

[00:05:59] So it wasn't really a big risk you know, there in terms of capital expense or anything like that go out and get a lease and fit up or buy a building.

Equipment wise, you know, it was pretty easy. I think her first purchase of any equipment at all in this, entire business history was a \$300 or \$350 electronic chocolate tempering machine.

[00:06:19] And I remember her buying it and saying, oh my gosh, you know, we just spent all this money on this tempering machine. What if, nobody buys any chocolate, you know? And I was like, well, you're gonna have a really nice tempering machine for our home use. And I still had an outside employment up until 2012.

[00:06:34] So when we started in 1998, so I was actually working outside of the business for most of the early years.

[00:06:39] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like you didn't have huge ambitions when you started. Did you have any business experience before this or did your wife?

[00:06:50] **Mark Elvidge:** yeah, I mean, she, she's pretty creative in making products that taste good. Like she was always a really good baker and a cook and things like that. So she had kind of the let's say the creative and the technical side to it. And I had some business experience.

[00:07:06] I was, you know, a general manager of a travel retail slash duty free store up on the Canadian border and, running pretty much most of the aspects of that business on a, daily basis and managing people. So it wasn't that challenging for me to agree to take on, you know, the business side.

[00:07:20] **David Crabill:** So one thing that's interesting is that Vermont has actually had a cottage food law or a law for home food production, as far as I know, for longer than any other state. I think they started in 1976 they created a law for selling food from home. Was that something that you even looked into at that point?

[00:07:43] Did you, consider the laws when you started selling out of the house?

[00:07:47] **Mark Elvidge:** we did actually. And we actually reached out to the health department and had them, kind of do an assessment of our house and you can start I don't know if it's still the same figure or not, but I know when we started, you could sell up to 10, 000 a year of product that you made in your house without getting like a health department license from the state of Vermont.

[00:08:11] But we got the license before we sold anything to anybody. ahead of even making a sale. We wanted to make sure that, you know, we were following, as good as food safety program as we could, given it was in our house, right? so we did that. We registered the business with the Secretary of State.

[00:08:27] We incorporated and did a subchapter S corporate You know, kind of set up. So there was, you know, a little, little bit of investment there, but, not any tremendous amount.

[00:08:36] **David Crabill:** Well, so you had this idea and you decided to start the business. You got all the licensing. What was that actually like when you actually started to sell? People had told you you should sell it. Did sales start increasing right away? Was it a really slow go in the beginning?

[00:08:54] What was that first year like?

[00:08:55] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah. So we started believe it or not you know, we started as an online only business. so in 1998, In January, we, put up a website and I remember it was this if anybody remembers the AOL we, had kind of a, you could do a website on AOL and it was, free.

[00:09:14] I mean, it was like this [http www.aol.com slash members slash](http://www.aol.com/slash/members/slash) You're never going to find me, you know, kind of a thing. And, so we did that. We, we started selling online believe it or not in 1998. And I believe the first internet sale of all time selling anything was in 94. So the internet was pretty new.

[00:09:34] Obviously, Google didn't exist. Right. So there was no real, pay per click or, you know, kind of way that you can do keyword spend or anything like that that you can today to kind of try to create awareness find new customers. So put up a website and people found us I mean it was really interesting I guess there was some search engines and I think people kind of found us, you know, those with, we're searching for nut free because our, we were the first one to do nut free and peanut free on purpose. So the relevance was good if it was, if they searched for it, right? That's the question. Did people and do people search for, for that term?

[00:10:10] And the other thing we, we did as well is a couple of customers, early customers who found us online were members of support groups, right? So they, in every major city in the country, they had support groups that used to meet monthly and get together and Tell other members about brands that they've

found that they thought were either interesting or they liked or they trusted and You know kind of share ideas So what was interesting is that somebody in let's say Philadelphia would discover us and then Go and tell people at their support group about us and then the next day we would get 15 phone calls from people in Philadelphia saying Oh, you know, we heard about you at the support group meeting, and are you guys really not free, and how do you know you're not free?

[00:10:53] And so lots of questions, right? Because it's a serious pretty serious allergy, and being parents of a child with a life threatening allergy we understood that, and we got it. Really early on the precautions you had to take and making sure that you were sourcing ingredients that were having no chance of any kind of cross contact with, peanuts or nuts throughout your supply chain.

[00:11:15] Right? So that's kind of how we started online and shipping stuff. You know, we didn't have a storefront and we didn't run around and sell to local stores until, a few years later. But it was mostly shipped out of our house. And, you know, I remember Gail would Get a bunch of orders and make the products and I would pack it up at night and, run it to the post office the next day on my way to work.

[00:11:37] And we would be mailing, stuff all over the country. And it just, it's just a lot of word of mouth and it just kind of organically grew online and we were lucky. I mean, we were, it was the right time. It was maybe a little bit ahead of, ahead of our time in terms of, you know, internet and free from.

[00:11:51] It worked and it wasn't a lot of competition in the space. So it was like you could just, you know, organically grow and it grew. I mean, we, you know, we ended up with, several hundred customers you know, the first year. And then that, kept growing year after year and, Today, we still get a lot of discovery from people all over the world, basically, that need a nut free option.

[00:12:13] **David Crabill:** Well, it was so uncommon at that time to be selling online. We're talking about the very early days of e commerce. Why did you decide to go that route? I mean, it was much more common at that time to, you know, sell at markets or whatever. Like, why did you feel confident or maybe you weren't confident at all, but what caused you to choose to be online only at that time?

[00:12:36] **Mark Elvidge:** I think it's a couple of things. I, you know, we were members of a local support group here in the, Burlington, Vermont, Chittenden County area, and, you know, there were probably a dozen or so members and,

you know, when you think about our market and the total addressable market of, people with the.

[00:12:53] Peanut or tree nut allergy. It was large, but it was pretty geographically dispersed. So setting up at a farmer's market or uh, you know, a little fair or something locally, you'd sell chocolate to people that, tasted it and liked it, but you wouldn't necessarily be reaching our target market.

[00:13:13] And it was pretty important for us to reach the target market, which is Those that have the allergy. So putting the website up again, because it was a free site on AOL and it was, I think we did it ourselves with like Program called front page or something back in the day.

[00:13:29] And it was pretty archaic, you know, it didn't accept credit cards. People would have to call, they look online and then they'd call us with the order and we'd take a credit card, over the phone and, and then punch that through a little, card processing um, terminal.

[00:13:42] So it wasn't a big risk to do online and it was, I thought going to give us bigger exposure to more people who needed, you know, what we were trying to solve for them.

[00:13:52] **David Crabill:** I'm also thinking about eBay and I can't remember if eBay had started at that point or not. Was it ever a consideration to try to sell through, A platform online.

[00:14:04] **Mark Elvidge:** No, it wasn't. It really wasn't. And I'm not even sure at that point if eBay, I think they maybe started around that same time, 96 or 98. And I'm, guessing from her going from memory there instead of actually, Looking that up, but I'm not sure they did food. But we didn't look at that anyway.

[00:14:22] We wanted to do, we wanted to control it, right? We wanted to make the product and ship it directly to the consumer. You know, we, we kind of didn't want to do the grocery store route and the local store route either because, you know, we wanted the product to go directly from, Our nut free manufacturing, in that case, home today, I would say facility directly to the consumer.

[00:14:44] And we up until. Maybe five, six years ago didn't even sell on Amazon. It was always our own site. So now we're doing some third party platforms and doing our own fulfillment directly to those customers. But really

has been the last, short period of time that we've actually even been on those third party platforms.

[00:15:03] **David Crabill:** It's interesting to hear that you didn't want to be in grocery stores or go wholesale since I know you do a ton of wholesale. Now, what changed there? What got you into wholesale in the first place?

[00:15:16] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah, so the wholesale business, again, that, kind of grew organically, and again, our, our fans and our customers early adopters, they just, you know, we're so thrilled to find our products. And then it was, Very good. Like, so, so some free from items that you look at, you know, you might think it's going to miss taste, flavor, texture, and, you know, it'd be a little bland.

[00:15:38] You know, and again, the free from market has come a long way you know, in the past several years, but early on, we wanted to make sure that our products were actually gourmet quality. And delicious so that even if somebody didn't have a peanut or tree nut allergy, they would enjoy the product.

[00:15:54] So what happened is as people discovered us online for their children usually in their household, they would bring it in and then everybody would take tastes, right? you'd eat some and then they, the next order would be bigger. So not only did you get repeat orders, but the order.

[00:16:09] Size increase from these same you know, families. So everybody was, know, raving about how good it was. And then they, you know, on their shopping trips would tell their local grocery manager and say, Hey, you guys should really carry Vermont every free chocolates because, you know, we buy it online all the time and it's really good.

[00:16:27] And it's peanut free and tree nut free. You know, we get calls from, stores if you could do that today, that would be awesome. Right. But it's a little harder to get into grocery stores today. But basically a lot of the early growth in grocery really came through incoming inquiries.

[00:16:42] which is, Is a really nice thing.

[00:16:44] **David Crabill:** Do you remember about what year you actually started to do wholesale?

[00:16:50] **Mark Elvidge:** It was probably in 1999 or 2000. So it wasn't, it wasn't really long, but it was a year and a half to two years, I think. Which was



about the time we were, we were in our house about a year and a half you know, before we kind of had to move to an a little bit bigger space, right.

[00:17:05] When the house was taken over by packaging and ingredients and two or three chocolate machines and an employee or two coming to work at the house. It was kind of a good sign that he needed to do something different. So we moved into a little commercial building that we purchased and renovated and made into a little factory and a retail store.

[00:17:25] And it had our, warehouse in there, which was a tiny, you know, what we made into an all seasons. It was a porch basically, but we made it, we insulated it, Made it all season. That was our little warehouse and shipping area. And that was about mid 99 or so. and by that point we were selling to a few local stores.

[00:17:44] And you know, it wasn't any big, but we had, we had a couple of chocolate bars and some pops and things like that, some of the local stores were carrying and, the wholesale kind of grew from there and as did, mail order channel direct to consumer is still about 60 percent of what we do today which is again, a nice, channel because you're controlling it.

[00:18:02] We're making it, we're packing it, and we're shipping it directly to the consumer. So there's that nice comfort level there. The consumer's getting something directly from you know, our free from factory and then being able to open up with confidence and know that nobody's touched it along the way.

[00:18:17] **David Crabill:** Now, I saw somewhere that you said that you were the very first chocolate business to cater to the nut free market, correct?

[00:18:27] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah, yeah. We were the first ones to be peanut free and tree nut free on, on purpose. Right when, and when I say on purpose, I mean, you know, we marketed the product as peanut and tree nut free from day one to that allergic community. again, there's other brands out there and there's other products that are just naturally nut free and peanut free and, you know, they're now starting to do a little bit of push into that market saying, Oh yeah, we are not free.

[00:18:52] And they're participating in some of the allergen, kind of platforms and, and apps. But we were really the first ones to market it as being nut free.

[00:19:00] **David Crabill:** How much of your success would you attribute to being first to market?

[00:19:06] **Mark Elvidge:** I think it had a large part to do. To do with our early success, I think not having really a lot of like a crowded field, right? Like today there's, you know, there's a bunch of nut free chocolates, right? And there's, peanut free chocolate, there's nut free chocolate, then there's all top nine allergen free.

[00:19:25] Chocolate of which, you know, we're not. We're peanut free and tree nut free and then we can solve, you know, the needs for a few other allergens as well, but we're not dairy free. We're not soy free. We're not wheat free. But we've got products that we can kind of guide people to within, you know, there's other allergies that would, would make sense provided they're not, you know, anaphylactic to those allergens.

[00:19:43] So having been the first one and the internet wasn't crowded and And we were out there kind of let us give us a little bit of a runway, I think to kind of you know, continue to grow our customer base. You know, without, without, without Major, you know, kind of investment like today.

[00:20:01] You'd need that right to go out and try to find, you know your market or your base. it's pretty expensive today to do that kind of stuff so I just think it gave us an early an early start at that some of the really early adopters that discovered us back in 98 and 99 and even you know into the early 2000s Parents discovered us, you know, when their kids were four or five, six years old.

[00:20:24] And you know, every year for birthday for different holidays, you know, the major holidays that are chocolate centric right throughout the year. And then the high school graduation and then the college study sessions and exam cramming and baskets sent to the dorm rooms. and Kids that were, you know, three, four, five, six years old when the parents first discovered us are still, you know, kind of customers today, right?

[00:20:50] Their parents are still sending them stuff and, and these, and these kids are upwards of, my son is 30 now you know, and he was four, you know, when we started, started the business. So we've done some wedding favors. For some of the, really early adopters. I mean, the kids that were five years old grew up on it and now we've done their, you know, two piece wedding truffles with the bride and groom name on it. So that's a, that's a pretty good feeling.

[00:21:13] **David Crabill:** I was just curious, your son Tanner, has he worked for the company? is he working for the company now?

[00:21:21] **Mark Elvidge:** During elementary school and high school, he would, he would go and help Gail. My wife you know, a little bit after school and, and things like that. And he, he'd, pick orders and help tie ribbons and bows and stuff like that when he um, when he could, when he felt like it. you know, in the last few years he's done a few projects for us in terms of some analysis and some you know, kind of market research and things like that, that he's kind of done you know, on his own for us. But he's, he's actually uh, you know, went to college in Boston and, you know, did, did a few of the co ops. And then last, Five years, he's lived over in London, England, and he's in tech. And he's just recently moved back to Boston in late October.

[00:21:59] So they're back local again. but he, he doesn't work for the company. he definitely has a pretty good handle of, of what's going on though. And, and, and it's pretty helpful. With some of the analysis and spreadsheets that he can do and kind of giving a business insight on on it It kind of an outside look but yet a connected outside look but because he's not in it every day I view it as a he's not in the forest, right?

[00:22:21] He's looking from the higher level

[00:22:23] **David Crabill:** I know a lot of parents, they hope that their kids will, you know, maybe take business over someday or they're building a business, you know, for future generations. Is that something that you've um, Hoped he would do someday

[00:22:37] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah, I mean, I think that's always, something that you, if you could build something and, have it carry on right after, through succession and have it carry on and, and still go out, you know, the, the mission, right. The mission and the vision that the company has and you continue to grow it and add new offerings and reach new customers.

[00:22:56] and certainly He knows that opportunity's there. and if he wants to, ever come back to Vermont and do that, that would be super great. But he's, you know, he's in tech and he's kind of doing many different things right now.

[00:23:07] and sometimes, in most family owned businesses, it's, it's really good for the children to get out and do different things and learn different things from different companies and, kind of see what it's like in different regions or cities or in, in his case, countries with being in London.

[00:23:23] and then come back with a new perspective and, be able to really just, take it to an even higher level at some point if, if he wishes, right? So that,

so that opportunity is always there whether that, that happens or not, who knows at this point.

[00:23:35] **David Crabill:** when it started, it was your wife, Gail, who started the business, like, how involved was she in the business at that point versus you? can you just give me like a snapshot of, of the timeline of how that worked?

[00:23:50] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah. Yeah. So, technically, we started it together, but it was, it was her idea and she was going to be the one, doing the business. And then I was going to help her with the business end of it, like the accounting and the marketing and, you know, Anything else, business wise.

[00:24:05] again we've gone through a little bit of history now, but having in the house and then our first move to South Hero and then we moved back to Grand Isle to like a bigger industrial building. And up until 2012 Gail was doing the day to day. And running the business from, you know, taking orders and customer service and managing the employees.

[00:24:27] And, you know, we probably had, at that point, 15. To 20 employees on staff. and she was doing that handling the day to day and just doing that. And then in 2012 13, I guess I joined the company full time. So I was doing, you know, nights and weekends and whatever days off I had and, you know, helping out as much as I could.

[00:24:52] But in 2000, late 2012 I actually joined the business full-time. And then at that point she kind of stepped back from the day to day and continued with product development. marketing like catalogs and seasonal flyers packaging deciding, you know, how, how things were going to be packaged and what shapes we were going to offer for this holiday and flavors and things like that.

[00:25:15] So kind of took a different role and stepped back and, you know, kind of did that uh, even today from home. Uh, So she does not come in to the office. here every day. We have, 38. Employees now and a pretty full day our factory's buzzing and, there's a lot going on every day.

[00:25:32] So I run the day to day and, and she still does the flyers and catalogs and new product stuff from home and, you know, we collaborate a lot, through emails and texts all day and then nights and weekends where, you know, we're talking about, you Stuff business related. So it, it's kind of switched totally you

know, the early, early part of the business was, you know, kind of she, and of late it's been me, you know, for the last what it was 10, 12 years, I guess.

[00:25:55] **David Crabill:** so a lot of successful businesses come out of these, you know, spousal partnerships. Even though you had a job for the first 14 years, I guess, and you're just doing nights and weekends How important do you feel like your involvement in the business was?

[00:26:11] You obviously had some business and management experience to bring to the table. Like if you had just say, been so preoccupied with your business or career, you just let her do the business on her own, where do you think it would be today?

[00:26:24] **Mark Elvidge:** that's tough to say. I, I think at that point, if, if I wasn't able to come on board, we would have, you know, you know, try to hire somebody in to actually do that. And again, you know, we've got, a general manager and I've got a director of sales and we have a full time sales and marketing coordinator.

[00:26:39] We've got a full time food safety and quality lead. So it would probably be different. We probably wouldn't have made the moves we've made into um, Colchester that we moved into a little over five years ago was a pretty big step. You know, it's a bigger building and we've got capacity now to pretty much triple or quadruple our, our business.

[00:27:04] And it, was a pretty big investment in terms of fit up and build out. So it's uh, you know, kind of poised and ready, to go to that next level. that investment may not have happened and that push. So we, we maybe still would be back in the islands and maybe just a little bit smaller scale.

[00:27:17] **David Crabill:** What do you feel like you've had to learn to become the president or the CEO of a company like this? Like it's, pretty sizable now, obviously, shipping worldwide and a lot of employees.

[00:27:30] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah. So I guess I was fortunate in the business that I was a general manager of for so many years. Kind of being involved in most of the day to day decisions and operations. And, we had upwards of 80 people on staff. It was a 24 7 operation. so managing people was always kind of a I guess an easier thing for me to of understand and take on.

[00:27:53] Thanks and I think the biggest thing is that the general knowledge that I've been able to garner over the years has really, I think, helped me

because, you know, I understand accounting really well. I understand law. I understand, what you need, for insurance. I understand, you know, facilities and building you know, the move, our third building uh, right.

[00:28:14] So this one is actually really tuned in perfectly because from the previous two, you learn, Oh, I want the grease trap accessibility to be right at that door so they don't have to come in with the hose, right? So you think about things like that every time you experience the next step.

[00:28:30] And that to me is, is the really fun part is that every day you know, you try to learn and improve, right. If and you look at it as a continuing learning experience and a continuous improvement process. And that's what kind of keeps the excitement going. And, Well, we've been doing the business for over 26 years now and you know, I still am excited to get up in the morning and come into the office and work with the team and, and solve problems.

[00:28:55] You know, if something isn't quite working right or there's a machine that needs tweaking. I mean, it's just, It's kind of intuitive now to just look at it and try to figure out just need to do this and let's try that right and so the whole process has just been a Super learning experience and you know one that I probably wouldn't trade for anything

[00:29:12] **David Crabill:** I was wondering about that because, you know, you're, you're now truly a factory operation, right? You've, your products in at least, I think, a thousand stores. You're shipping all over the world and from kind of the outside looking in, you're doing the same thing over and over and over again.

[00:29:29] But I guess it doesn't feel like that on the inside, right?

[00:29:31] **Mark Elvidge:** No, not at all because everything, that we do is you know, what's what's that next product launch, right? during COVID in 2020, we launched sun blossoms, which are a, sun butter filled cup, much like the shape of, you know, like a Reese's peanut butter cup, or, some of the other nut butter cups that you see on the market.

[00:29:49] And it's an alternative for people with the nut allergy and peanut allergy, safe for them because it's made with sun butter and they're really good. And then we launched in January of this year. So that was just a couple of years ago. We launched that and we brought in a, you know, a one shot depositing line from Italy.

[00:30:03] We bought it during COVID and brand new from Italy, set it up and, started cranking those out. And then, and then in January this year, we launched a mini version of that called mini sun blossoms and milk and dark, and those are doing really good. So all of these, Little launches and little new product development things that we have, you know, going on behind the scenes.

[00:30:22] Every day they, they kind of advance and we're almost ready for that. And then it's, you know, we pick a date and it's going to launch. all of that's pretty exciting. And it's not the same old thing every day. You know, every day we've got, something different going on in terms of, you know, we might have a big special project for podcasting.

[00:30:38] some candy store in New York who's doing something special, but they want, you know, they want to co brand with us or whatever. So they'll have their name and our name on the product and, you know, so there's things like that that always happen. you know, and then it's launching, like, so since we moved into this building in September of 2018, this latest building that we got some room to actually stage palettes and do some distribution and bigger wholesale business.

[00:31:01] You know its the next region of Whole Foods, right? So we have a new Whole Foods region launching this year. So that's exciting. So you're lining up your merchandisers and your People that are going in and, you know, fronting your product and rotating it and finding auxiliary kind of locations within the store.

[00:31:17] So all of that stuff's kind of, getting set up for that next launch. Right. And then we launched a couple of new distributors. Actually, I think we launched about four new distributors last year. No big ones, but you know, small regional that seem to do really well with our brand because we're not mass market.

[00:31:33] You know, we're specialty and we're, and we're niche and we're gourmet and we're premium you know, so you have to pick your retailers right to make, the product move on the shelf. So there's always, always projects like that, David, that really isn't uh, isn't boring at all. I mean, the days go by so fast.

[00:31:50] I can't even believe it's Friday every time I turn around.

[00:31:52] **David Crabill:** Well, a lot of the people listening to this are early stage entrepreneurs, maybe haven't even started their business yet. And you're kind of living the dream, right? Many of the people listening to this dream of

eventually having a brick and mortar, having an international brand. what does it actually feel like to be living it or there?

[00:32:13] Do you feel like you've arrived at a goal? Just, what's it like to be running a business like this?

[00:32:19] **Mark Elvidge:** We do have, I mean, in our factory store we do have a retail. You know, that people can come in, we're in um, over a thousand stores, as you mentioned earlier. You know, we do mail order direct to consumer all over the world. Mostly the U S and Canada of course. And then we're on Amazon.

[00:32:37] It's our own page and we fulfill those orders from here. So we don't ship to Amazon for them to ship. They actually, Take the order and then we send it to their customer. And then we're on a couple of wholesale platforms as well, which are doing really well. But we're never done.

[00:32:51] I mean, you're not done ever because, you know, every time you move or every time you want to bring in, you know, like a new flow wrapper or a new line for this or a new enrober for that. equipment is, pretty expensive. You know, we've always bought new equipment. We don't buy used because of our You know, our nut free market is, pretty sensitive in terms of allergic reactions and things like that too.

[00:33:15] Right. So we don't want to chance something that's been used you know, for packing or dipping, or whatever you know, nuts or almonds or things like that, or peanuts. But our cost of our You know, raw materials are, are more let's say, and our equipment is maybe more than somebody who could just go out and, you know, buy a bunch of used equipment at auction and kind of not worry about it.

[00:33:35] So there's still a lot of work to do. And you know, it's, it's a neat thing. Gail and I were down in Boston a couple of weeks ago visiting Tanner and, just going, going to some of the local stores and seeing Vermont Nut Free on the shelf and how, Some of the positioning and some of the you know, the range of products that some of these retailers carry is just, you know, it's just so proud to walk in and see it.

[00:33:59] You know, there's a couple of retailers in New York city and Manhattan who have huge displays of ours because they've got a customer base that, you know, goes in and buys it and they have to order every 10 days. You



know, but seeing those displays and the space that they're allocating to, to our little, A little brand from Vermont is kind of fun you know, to kind of see that.

[00:34:18] So it feels good. But in no means does it feel like we've arrived or, or we're done or, any of that stuff. There's a lot of people in the U S particularly with peanut tree nut allergies. And we really only have reached like a really small percentage of them. I can't tell you every week how many calls we get saying, Oh, I've had a peanut allergy my whole life and I'm 28 years old.

[00:34:42] And where have you guys been? It's like, so people haven't discovered us yet. So we're not done. There's a lot of work to do out there. And, and, and again, you know, anybody who likes chocolate. Gourmet chocolate can enjoy our product and they're not going to be missing any taste, flavor, or texture. But we've got a lot of work to do just reaching the total addressable peanut tree nut allergic market, let alone the total addressable chocolate market.

[00:35:05] **David Crabill:** you kind of insinuated it there, but I was going to ask sort of like what drives you to keep growing it? Because seems like, you know, at this point you've got the factory, you've got employees, you've got distribution methods. You're probably making quite a bit of money through the business.

[00:35:24] So you could settle in, right? And instead of just trying to keep growing and all the time. What caused you to keep trying new products or growth?

[00:35:34] **Mark Elvidge:** I think customers like new things you know, and I don't mean just a new shape for Halloween or a new shape for, Valentine's Day or something like that, but having new product Iterations people are getting more into snacking now, right, and better for you.

[00:35:49] And how do we figure out how to, get to some of that market that's also needs to be peanut and tree nut free? and again, it's not just growth at any cost.

[00:35:58] a lot of the mass market brands are, I don't even know how they can sell, you know, a bag of some of the stuff that they offer for what they sell it for after distribution and markup and retailers and, and profitability. But

[00:36:12] I mean, some brands go out and, pay slotting and pay to play and, you know, Spent a fortune getting their brand into all the retail stores and they can be tens of millions of dollars a year in sales, but not profitable because,

they're paying to be there and They're burning through cash just to get listed in these stores.

[00:36:30] So, we're trying to do it intelligently as well. So we're trying to pick the right retailers and work with them and go deeper. And you know, we're not in, 30, 000 stores. We're in, you know, a thousand or maybe 2000 with the, some of the online platforms. But it's pretty rare that we've paid to be in a We do promotions and yes, we'll help retailers will provide racks and things like that and we'll send them customers because our mail order customers will go into a retailer that carries us and buy our product,

[00:36:56] so we can drive that as a selling proposition to retailers. So we want to be available to more customers that need our product. And currently there's some customers that need our product that still don't know we exist, believe it or not, after 26 years. that's what kind of, drives me and, you know, kind of pushes me to, Get up and come to work every day and have fun doing it.

[00:37:15] I mean, we got a super team of people here that, that are so nice to work with that it makes it easier.

[00:37:20] **David Crabill:** When you started, like, How much more were you able to charge or what was your pricing strategy and how has it changed over time?

[00:37:29] **Mark Elvidge:** Our pricing has never been you know, charge what you can charge. think what we've always done is we've taken our costs, right? So all of our ingredients, your COGS, your cost of goods sold is your cost of your ingredients and your packaging, your direct labor you know, the attributable overhead.

[00:37:46] And then putting kind of an industry specific target gross profit on that. and then that basically should flow down and, cover all your overhead so that at the end of the year you've, you've got a profit. You know, obviously in those early days we really didn't have any overhead.

[00:38:01] Until we actually hired an outside employee maybe a year in, you know, we didn't really have any labor costs. you should really attribute an account for your own value when you're starting a business and, and make sure that you're, you're building it enough that you could get paid if you needed to or wanted to.

[00:38:17] But you know, in the early, early days, we didn't really have that, you know, and when we think about things I remember our, our pops, like our, you know, like a dinosaur pop or a puppy pop back in the early days. I think when we first started selling, you know, we were charging \$2.50 for those pops.

[00:38:33] You know, and I think they're \$3.49 or, \$3.95 today. you know, in 26 years haven't haven't gone up crazy at all. And we've been able to, with each move and with each, kind of iteration of what we do, we've tried to improve our efficiencies, so that we could get more out of the building every day for a decreased or preferably not an increased cost, right?

[00:38:58] So that your efficiencies drive your profitability.

[00:39:02] And again, because we're premium gourmet and you know, all our products are purchased from nut free and peanut free sources and you know, we don't buy huge volumes of anything as we buy it.

[00:39:13] So our costs and our inputs are higher. A lot of our stuff, you know, yes, it's a chocolate factory, but there's a lot of labor in what we do. People are hand foil wrapping all the little different shapes for the different holidays before they're bagged and hand tied. there's not any kind of a pour the melted chocolate into this machine and push a button and out it comes sort of thing, right?

[00:39:35] There's still a lot of labor and a lot of artisanal kind of efforts in what we do.

[00:39:41] But generally, you know, in, in specialty foods, I mean, you, you want to have a 45 to 50 percent gross profit margin right? Otherwise you're not going to have The money to pay the rent and the staff and the overhead and the utility bills and all the stuff at, at the end of the day, it's that costs actually quite a bit of money. So you want to make sure that you've, you know, you're looking at your, all your ingredients, costs, your labor and your cost, right? And then making sure that you're selling it for enough. And then, our thing, when we started, we were just going to do mail order. So we didn't really even build in, you know, the wholesale and distribution levels.

[00:40:15] So that was a different challenge once we're starting to sell wholesale, because obviously that, drops down into your and your profits. So you got to make sure you've got enough to cover those different layers as well.

[00:40:25] **David Crabill:** Well, when you started the business, it sounds like you kind of almost had a monopoly on the market to some degree. So why did

you always stick to, you know, not charging as much as you could sell something for because it seems like you probably could have sold The products for more than you did, right?

[00:40:45] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah, I think we could have to be honest with you, I think we could have, but again, that wasn't purpose. our purpose was to provide safe treats that were affordable and, you know, within reach of the consumer who needed it. Right. I think that's always been our, you know, kind of our motto and our, our credo going, from way back when we started to now even.

[00:41:06] And we try to make sure that we can price our products on the shelf that, After all the costs and, the higher costs of ingredients and everything that we do, that it's not too much more than the mass market products. It's, obviously it's expected to be a little bit more, but when you look at, ounce per ounce, pricing.

[00:41:25] I mean, our, products are even our boxes of truffles and our heart shaped boxes of truffles that are our most expensive items are still, ounce for ounce, much less than Godiva, Newhouse. And, you know, some of the really premium brands out there on the market. And again, our truffles are hand rolled and hand dipped.

[00:41:43] they're, pretty artisanal.

[00:41:44] **David Crabill:** How have you balanced automation versus hand-making? Cause I know you've got a lot of machines. Now I could see from some of your TV spots, you do do a significant amount of automation, but you still have a lot of things hand done. How have you sort of walked that line as you've built this business and grown?

[00:42:05] **Mark Elvidge:** That's an area that we're constantly looking at, because anything that we can do to drive efficiency and get more out of the Production run than you could yesterday, right? It drives your costs down. So, ultimately that's the goal of any manufacturer is to drive that wedge between, you know your gross revenue and your costs so that you can, improve EBITDA, right?

[00:42:28] Which is the big measure of anything whether you're gonna get outside financing or equity investments or bank loans or whatever you need, you need to drive that profitability. So what we do every day is we, we look at it, so our, our pretzels, our pretzels, we have in robbers that enrobe the pretzels.

So we have to put the pretzels on the belt and then they go through a chocolate bath and they shake off the excess.

[00:42:49] And then they go through a cooling tunnel. They can put on a tray and then they're hand decorated. So we string a chocolate decoration over the dried pretzels and then they get handbagged. So there's a little bit of combination of automation and manual handling on that product.

[00:43:07] You know, the one shot depositor line is pretty automated, right? So we just have to feed the molds into the machine and that, that deposits the cup and then it shakes and goes through a cooling tunnel and they come out, get demolded and then, you know, the cycle just keeps going. You know, our chocolate bars, we don't have a molding line for chocolate bars.

[00:43:25] There's their hand filled molds but we have a flow wrapper for them. So instead of hand wrapping those, we have a flow wrapper that, you know, wraps them in a wrapper at 70 pieces a minute. So we try to balance the total cost of the product with what you have room for uh, what you've got. Capital, four, right? If you want an automated molding line, that's, you know, it's, it's 80, 90 feet of length and uh, half a million dollars up on investment just for that, you know, that one line. you have to kind of look at the volume of the product you're doing, the particular product, and, weigh those kind of cost benefit analysis into, into figuring out, do you get that machine?

[00:44:04] You know, and sometimes getting the machine doesn't really eliminate labor. gets you more products done in that same, you know, in a less amount of time. But you know, if you buy a high speed flow wrapper, you think, Oh my gosh, I just need a person to run it. You need three people to run the high speed flow wrapper, right?

[00:44:21] So you got to have enough product that's making it worthwhile for that investment to go through that flow wrapper every day so that you can justify having the cost of that equipment. And the three people it takes to run it. You know what I mean? So there's kind of that balance that you're always trying to figure out.

[00:44:38] Okay. Do you do enough chocolate bars to warrant that flow wrapper or that enrobing line? You know, and then some things we, you know, we do enough of that. We've, purchased that equipment for those particular items, but there's still a lot of stuff. Like all our seasonal is pretty much, hand wrapped and hand packaged.

[00:44:53] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like you've lost anything as you've grown?

[00:44:58] **Mark Elvidge:** I do not know in terms of, I'm assuming you're talking about, taste and flavor and texture and things like that. I know. I don't think we have at all. We haven't really changed recipes. You know, we're still making the same caramels that, Gale made in our house back in 98. Right.

[00:45:15] it's the same caramel recipe. We have a kettle you know, a much bigger kettle. nobody's stirring it on the stove anymore. But it's the same recipe. Nothing that we do has scaled up to the level that it would be mega batches, right? Still our batches are pretty small when you think about it at the end of the day so that our scale up isn't really a scale up. It's just more volume coming out of this, this equipment we've purchased over the years because it made sense to get it.

[00:45:40] **David Crabill:** So, you mentioned that you moved to Amazon in 2016 and I know that's a whole another animal. Most of the guests I've had on the podcast don't sell on Amazon yet. What should somebody know about jumping into the whole Amazon game?

[00:45:58] **Mark Elvidge:** Amazon owns the traffic on the web. They own the traffic. So if you've got an item that is shelf stable and not perishable, that you could sell on Amazon through Amazon Fulfillment, right? Ship to their warehouses and they fill out the orders. You could have a pretty big business just doing that.

[00:46:16] It's interesting. So, we do our own fulfillment. We have never to this day spent a dime on advertising on Amazon. Our pricing on Amazon is the same as our website but we charge more shipping on Amazon than we do our website.

[00:46:32] **David Crabill:** So, you don't do any free shipping on Amazon.

[00:46:35] **Mark Elvidge:** We don't. We have grown every year on Amazon particularly in the last few years. It's, it's really grown a lot. We started with our own website. So our, our own website is much bigger than our Amazon website. I've got colleagues in the business both of which we're doing million dollars plus on Amazon a year.

[00:46:54] And one of them just shut their Amazon down. They want to go strictly on their own website. And they're going to just pull out of Amazon and

do their own website. And then I've got another, another colleague who. is going to just let their website kind of coast and not spend any Google ads or pay per click or any digital marketing spend on there.

[00:47:16] And they're going to push the Amazon accelerator and spend some money on Amazon, both with their advertising and their promoted products. And then there's a, they have a search engine on there. Like my understanding is today, more people search an item on Amazon before they do on Google. So.

[00:47:33] There's a whole Google Analytics kind of Google ad spend thing on Amazon that I'm not versed in it at all. So, my terminology is probably not even correct here, but it's, it's almost better than pay per click on Google. To do that on Amazon from what I understand.

[00:47:49] **David Crabill:** So, what about with Google, SEO what are some of the things you've learned about marketing your business online?

[00:47:58] **Mark Elvidge:** So, up until let's say 10 years ago, we didn't spend any money on Google. I don't want to say we didn't do any SEO, but it was all organic. Doing meta tags and keywords in our product descriptions and things like that, and then the relevance, like if people search nut free chocolate or peanut free chocolate on any search engine, whether it's, you know, Google or Bing or DuckDuckGo or any of them we come up one, two, or three organic.

[00:48:23] And still today we might have the first or second paid ad as well today. But the organic one, two, or three is pretty much us. And we always had that. And the relevance of what we offer and what people are searching for kind of made that work. I know recently they've gone to this G4 kind of thing and it's The whole algorithm about, spending money on keywords has changed and I don't even pretend to understand how that, that all works.

[00:48:50] But I know it's changed. So about 10 years ago, maybe eight, 10 years ago, we started Using a digital marketing agency with a very small budget monthly to do some Google ads and some pay per click stuff and, you know, Google shopping has never really worked for us, but the Google ads have.

[00:49:07] And then the, the keyword search. And you know, what was really interesting and some of the discussions we had with the agency going, going into it was like, Oh, you, you've got to pay for brand. You've got to pay for Vermont net free and you've got to make sure you're, you're bidding on those key terms and because they're relevant to you, it won't really cost that much.

[00:49:24] And you really need to make sure you're doing that. And I was like, why would I do that? We're in one, two or three, on organic, you know, if you search it. so they, convinced us to, pay for brand and, it works because a few months that we didn't do it, We lost some traction because other brands will bid on your keywords. You know, they'll bid on nut free chocolate or they'll bid on peanut free chocolate, right? Which isn't, they wouldn't bid, you know, on Vermont nut free chocolate, but because that's part of that keyword, it's, something that we have to bid on now.

[00:49:52] But again, we do a very, very minimal budget monthly plus the agency fee. And it works. I mean, we're getting consistently anywhere from uh, I think the lowest month I've seen is eight times return on ad spend. And the highest has been about 30 you know, during Christmas or Easter, high chocolate seasons we get the most return on our investment, which is, I'd rather spend that money when it's quiet and get some revenue in.

[00:50:17] Yeah. But we have to kind of do it when the holidays are happening, cause that's when people are searching for your product. So depending on what your product is and what you're offering you might want to do some, you know, when do people buy it, right? And is it all around the holidays, then that's where you need to put your budget on the, on the Google ads.

[00:50:30] **David Crabill:** Well, it sounds like your business has just, you know, grown. There's obviously been a lot more interest in allergy friendly products. There's obviously been a lot of growth in e commerce, but have there been any kind of challenges along the way?

[00:50:50] Like, has it just been this progressive upward growth? Or have there been times where your business was at a crossroads or you had a major challenge to face?

[00:51:01] **Mark Elvidge:** So I think we've been fortunate that our, business top line has grown every year, right? We've, made some investments particularly five years ago when we moved to Colchester, right? It was a pretty big investment and fit up for this building. We, we also, you know, brought in some more equipment.

[00:51:18] We, for the first time engaged a full time. Director of sales that's employed by us you know, in that kind of the year before we moved in here. And then the, the food safety was about a year before we moved in here too. we always had a, you know, a HACCP team and uh, you know, a group of people that, you know, kind of did our food safety program, but having a dedicated



person moving into this bigger facility, obviously created a need for more investment needed to make this space work.

[00:51:47] Right. So our top line revenue has grown every year since, since we started. But we've had years where we've, you know, done these bigger investments and particularly five years ago. I mean, we, Moved into this building in 2018, in September of 18. So about a year and a half after that, COVID hit. So all of the stuff that was going to happen with distributors coming on board and new launches into retail partners got put on hold because stores weren't caring about the peripheral of the store, like specialty and niche products. They wanted paper towels and toilet paper and cleaners and, and cereal and oatmeal and, the food, the grocery, right?

[00:52:24] Center store. So a lot of that stuff got put on hold for about two years. So it kind of delayed a little bit of our, growth plans, since that has, you know, last couple of years, we've really seen some, some progress there but probably a couple of years delayed. So even though you've got increases in sales every year, if you're, if you're, if you're Your overhead has increased, has increased a lot because of, you know, a new facility or a bunch of new equipment.

[00:52:50] I mean, that's all those expenses are all taking away from your increased gross sales, right?

[00:52:54] so challenges is just, keeping relevant keeping your customers interested in, your product by launching some new things and, trying out some promotions throughout the year that, may, you know, get some purchases in on necessarily a slow month, like a chocolate, like June, like who wants to buy, chocolate in June and July, right?

[00:53:12] So how do we keep those months going? Because the expenses are still the same, right? The salaries are there, the rent is the same, the air conditioning the building 24 7 because Stuff in the warehouse can't melt either. So I think it's just, you know, like any business has its, seasons.

[00:53:27] You got to capitalize on those seasons. Ours are Halloween when I think of it starting in the fall, Halloween, then Christmas, Hanukkah, valentines, and then Easter. You know, which is really good, but then it's quiet till Halloween. So we gotta figure out what, to do during those slower months to do strategic promotions and kind of just keep that flow coming in.

[00:53:44] **David Crabill:** Now, I saw that you were just mentioning Wirecutter, right? New York Times Wirecutter.

[00:53:51] **Mark Elvidge:** Yes,

[00:53:52] **David Crabill:** I mean, that seems pretty huge. Like has that been a massive uptick in people finding you?

[00:53:58] **Mark Elvidge:** I wouldn't say massive, but obviously that was great exposure the readership is huge and anytime something like that happens, even though it may not be like an immediate, you know. You know, kind of reaction from the customers and a call to activity or call to action on, on making a purchase or becoming a customer.

[00:54:16] People remember you know, they remember things. We were in People Magazine in in November of 2000. We had just moved into that building. in South Hero, out of the house. And we got a People Magazine four page article on us, just us. And that today even people will call us, Oh, I read about you in People back in 2000 and now my niece has an allergy or now my grandchild has an allergy to nuts and I remembered the story, you know, so it's all great awareness.

[00:54:44] And the more that you can be visible And make yourself aware. You know, it's a numbers game, right? So the more people that know about you, the more chance of somebody eventually going to be remembering that story or that article and saying, Oh yeah, I remember that. And now, you know, this person could really use that.

[00:55:02] So it's kind of like that, kind of a referral, a delayed referral.

[00:55:05] **David Crabill:** Yeah, so I can see you've been featured in a lot of press is that something that you've sought out? Is that something that you hire an agency to get for you or is that just all kind of come organically now?

[00:55:19] **Mark Elvidge:** it's a combination of both. For several years, we had a PR agency and probably about three years ago, we, we went away from that and moved to their, a bigger focus on their digital side, their digital marketing side of that same agency. And then We do have a PR, so she's an ex newscaster who does you know, kind of pitches for stories to key media, but doesn't write press releases, so she's more of a, she's doing it from like the reporter kind of side. So she'll do a, a story that's kind of ready to hand to a reporter so that the

reporter's got an easier decision of, you know, picking it up or whatever. So, and that's been probably about six months we've been working with her.

[00:56:04] that's pretty new. Just to try to, get a little bit more, a little bit more awareness of our brand.

[00:56:08] **David Crabill:** You know, I was just thinking about how, you know, obviously, Dealing with your son when he was eight months old and going through all of that was I'm sure scary and many times frustrating experience. But of course, if he had never had that peanut allergy in the first place, you would not have this business.

[00:56:31] Is that something that you've thought about of sort of like how out of that trial, I guess, has come this amazing business,

[00:56:38] **Mark Elvidge:** Yeah, I mean, that's, that's definitely true. 100%. I mean, had Tanner not had a peanut allergy, you know, Gail wouldn't have needed to look for other, alternatives and In, lack of finding thereof, starting our own chocolate company. So because that's the way it happened, it, it gave us a real reason, right?

[00:56:57] We have a why. And I think when you have a why you, you know, you're doing something. It really not only resonates more with your customer base and even retailers who list us, like the reason why and you can't make up you know, why, right? So genuine why and how, having to solve that problem led to this business is, is a good story in itself.

[00:57:21] **David Crabill:** Even though you were kind of first to market, I'm sure you still saw a lot of competitors coming up alongside of you. Why do you think you have sort of prevailed when I'm sure many of them have fallen off?

[00:57:37] **Mark Elvidge:** You know, I think there's still a few of them out there that started a little bit after us that are, still doing well. Some of them have gone a little wider and, and become more free from than just the peanuts and tree nuts. You know, there's a few that I know that were just peanut and tree nut free that are no longer in existence

[00:57:53] I've always, kind of had this credo that it's, you know, if, if you want to do something, you've got to kind of get to it and then you have to stick to it. And it's easy to give up, right? It's easy to stop you know, you got bad days, you got bad days.

[00:58:07] things where, half, half the staff doesn't show up. You've got days when, a couple of pieces of equipment break. everybody's got days where it's like, oh my gosh, you know, in my view, that's, those aren't reasons. Those are just, challenges to overcome that day.

[00:58:20] And I think the longer you kind of persevere, the more value you build for your brand. And. The more that you can just, you know, kind of have something that's going to, that's going to last.

[00:58:31] **David Crabill:** Well, awesome, Mark. Thank you so much for coming on today. Now, if somebody would like to learn more about your company, where can they find more information about it?

[00:58:44] **Mark Elvidge:** So they can reach out to me on my LinkedIn page. It's Mark Elvidge, E L V I D G E. Happy to connect with anybody. And then the company website is [www.vermontnutfree.com](http://www.vermontnutfree.com) and Vermont is all spelled out.

[00:58:59] **David Crabill:** Perfect. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:59:04] **Mark Elvidge:** Oh, my pleasure, David. Thank you very much for having me on.

[00:59:07] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/112](http://forrager.com/podcast/112). And if you're enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me your view on Apple podcasts.

[00:59:26] 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. 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.

[00:59:39] To get the course, go to [cottagefoodcourse.com](http://cottagefoodcourse.com). Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.