

Jenifer & Tristan Hoke with The Drunken Chef

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where we 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 Jenifer and Tristan Hoke. But first, are you building an email list for your business yet? If not, you really should be collecting customers email addresses and emailing them on a regular basis.

[00:00:20] Even these days, email continues to be better than social media for generating consistent sales, and the best part is that you own it. Once you build an email list, nobody can take it away from you. I personally use ConvertKit to manage email for my fudge business, and I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a free email marketing system for your business in less than one hour.

[00:00:42] So to learn more, you can go to forrager.com/email.

[00:00:46] All right, so I have Jenifer and Tristan on the show today. They live in Tecumseh, Oklahoma, and sell baked goods, smoked spices, and other items with their cottage food business, The Drunken Chef. In their first year of business, they struggled to find consistent sales despite trying many marketing avenues, including starting their own farmer's market.

[00:01:10] But finally, they found a sales venue that turned everything around, and now they are building an expanded kitchen on their property to try to keep up with the demand. Jenifer and Tristan's story is one of persistence and determination, as well as celebrating every single win, big and small. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Jenifer and Tristan. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:37] **Jenifer Hoke:** It's good to be here.

[00:01:39] **Tristan Hoke:** Awesome.

[00:01:40] **David Crabill:** Can you take me back to where this journey got started for you guys?

[00:01:45] **Jenifer Hoke:** Honestly, we've been looking at the cottage food laws in Oklahoma when they changed it in, I think 2021. And we had our second wedding. It was just the ceremony part in 2022 and ended up with a little bit of cash and we wanted to do some kind of business from home. And that's where we got the initial capital to get started.

[00:02:09] **David Crabill:** Now, I did see that your Facebook page started back in 2016. So what caused you to start that way back when?

[00:02:19] **Jenifer Hoke:** That was actually the first year that we were together and we started, working a kitchen at a bar where I had been a bartender and just serving bar food. And that's where we came up with the name, The Drunken Chef. And then that only lasted a few months. And that page was just there for the next few years until we decided to start the cottage food and we reignited the page.

[00:02:43] And it's kind of blown up since then.

[00:02:46] **David Crabill:** So do you guys both have backgrounds in food service?

[00:02:49] **Jenifer Hoke:** I do, no, he doesn't.

[00:02:53] **Tristan Hoke:** Well, I've been, running a barbecue for myself and, you know, family events since I learned when I was about 12 or 13 years old and been doing it since then.

[00:03:02] **David Crabill:** So with this bar and everything, was that your business? Was that somebody else's business? Was there like business ambitions there?

[00:03:10] **Jenifer Hoke:** It was somebody else's bar and they already had a kitchen in it, but it wasn't being used. And so we offered to come up with our menu and we did, you know, made from scratch quesadillas and burgers and, just basic bar food, homemade mop sticks and it was going quite well, but one of the owners was, eager to have one of his friends come in and take over the kitchen, I'll say it that way.

[00:03:33] And so we left and then didn't get back into the food business except on an informal basis, until August 17th of 22.

[00:03:41] **David Crabill:** Okay, so that was back in 2016. And it sounds like you guys What do you think held you back from pursuing another food business for another six years?

[00:03:55] **Jenifer Hoke:** Capital. We really wanted to get a food truck, but they're ridiculously expensive. And we just weren't willing to, bet the farm as it were. That would have been the only way to buy a food truck would have been to mortgage the farm. It's paid off. We don't want to do that.

[00:04:11] **David Crabill:** Right, See, I know you do live on a farm. Can you just share a little bit about your farm?

[00:04:17] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, It wasn't exactly a farm. It was, his grandpa's estate and, he used it as a mechanic shop. So there's a huge shop on it. It's about 32 acres. I'd always wanted a homestead and he finally got me some chickens a few years back and then it just kind of went from there and we had chickens and pigs and we've talked about getting cows or goats or sheep and we've got dogs that people drop off out in here in the country.

[00:04:41] So we've got. right now, seven dogs, and God knows how many cats, because people like to drop tomcats off,

[00:04:47] **Tristan Hoke:** No snakes.

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[00:04:48] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, we don't have mice or snakes, or worry about any of that, I don't know, I guess we started the actual farm animals, what, five years ago, probably.

[00:04:54] **David Crabill:** So you got animals. Are you also growing produce on the farm?

[00:04:59] **Jenifer Hoke:** We usually have a pretty big garden, but this year has been kind of a cluster. because we've been so busy with the cottage food that we have not had time. to plant the garden.

[00:05:11] **Tristan Hoke:** Well, we've got Five and a half inches of rain in the last 24 hours. it's been kind of a trend, so it's too wet.

[00:05:18]

[00:05:19] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, even if we had planted it would have all been washed away and messed up.

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[00:05:24] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like when you started the food business, it wasn't related to the farm necessarily. It wasn't related to the produce that you're growing,

[00:05:31] **Jenifer Hoke:** We'd like for it to be, We have planted some fruit trees to be able to use in the muffins, and we have used our pears in the muffins. I'd like to be able to grow as much of the produce as we can that we use in things, well, we do use our eggs in the muffins.

[00:05:48] in all of our baking. Is our farm fresh out? right?

[00:05:52] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like you guys sort of wanted to start this, commercial food venture. You're selling things that wouldn't be allowed under Oklahoma's law, Oklahoma's law improved so that you could sell certain types of items and actually quite a lot under their new law.

[00:06:07] It's very, unrestrictive. So was it the law change that caused you guys to look into this further? Or what was it about 2022 that, caused you to get this off the ground again?

[00:06:19] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, We've been looking at it since they changed it in 21 and trying to decide what we would want to do. I used to do wedding cakes a long time ago and, I did not want to get back into that business because that is an incredibly high stress business. So I wanted to do something that was a little more mellow, something we could sell out in front of our house because we have highway frontage and, we have kind of an ideal setup to sell out in front of our house so we wanted to do something where, you know, our commute was literally 15 seconds down the driveway and we came up with this wild idea for jumbo muffins, which I had never made before June of 22 in my entire life.

[00:06:55] **David Crabill:** It's not super typical for somebody to start a business around something that they've never done before. So what do you feel like was. The motivation or the drive to start a food business and find something to sell.

[00:07:11] **Tristan Hoke:** Self proprietorship, not having to work for somebody else, working the farm, but also having the farm itself produce funds to support itself. That's part of it.

[00:07:25] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah. We wanted for our cottage business to be able to support the farm until the farm could support itself. Does that make sense?

[00:07:30] **David Crabill:** Yeah, absolutely makes sense. And what are your backgrounds? And I know you said you sold wedding cakes. Is it running the farm? do you guys have day jobs?

[00:07:40] **Jenifer Hoke:** No, we don't have day jobs. I was originally in psychology, went to PhD program at University of Tulsa. And was only too glad to get out of that field and farm.

[00:07:55] **Tristan Hoke:** I was a mechanic pretty much all my life and then grew up on a ranch in Texas and then bought this place.

[00:08:03] **David Crabill:** All right. So you decided to start the cottage food business, try to bring in some income, it sounds like. you found, the muffin recipe that worked really well. So can you take me through the early stages of the cottage food venture when you decided to start it? What did that look like?

[00:08:22] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, honestly, it was right after our big reception wedding and we were supposed to go to a family reunion the next month for his family. And we had decided this in the interim for weeks. I really like science, which, that's nerdy. So I read a whole bunch of baking science and really wrote my recipes from scratch.

[00:08:43] I've never bought a recipe. I write them all. And we just took, I don't know, half a dozen different kinds up to this family reunion, just to see what they thought, get their feedback, good, bad, indifferent. And they all said they were amazing. And so we were like, okay, this is it.

[00:08:57] This is what we're going to do.

[00:08:57] **David Crabill:** And if you can think back to that time. What were your visions for the business? where did you predict that it would go?

[00:09:06] **Jenifer Hoke:** I don't know that we had a prediction. grandmother at one point had a bakery in Tecumseh. And so we had considered that actually having a storefront. We also have a big toy hauler trailer that we had thought

about selling out of, and we may still, but it was really, it was all kind of up the air.

[00:09:23] We didn't really have a, a vision for it. It was more of a, Let's just see where this goes.

[00:09:28] **David Crabill:** So what was your first sale day like, or the first time you actually put yourself out there and started to charge for your, products?

[00:09:37] **Jenifer Hoke:** We had what? Four people stopped the first day?

[00:09:41] **Tristan Hoke:** Yeah.

[00:09:41] **Jenifer Hoke:** We still have the first dollar taped up on our dartboard.

[00:09:45] **Tristan Hoke:** Four people and we were elated.

[00:09:47] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, we were thrilled. I think we made, I don't know, 40 bucks?

[00:09:50] **Tristan Hoke:** Yeah.

[00:09:50] **Jenifer Hoke:** we were opening then at like

[00:09:52] 6 in the morning because, you know, we thought muffins, breakfast food, and we had cold brew coffee and hot coffee, and I think we did tea at that point.

[00:10:00] And lemonade and I made homemade syrups that you could flavor your stuff yourself. And we only did muffins for probably a year. And then we kind of

[00:10:09] branched out into some other treats

[00:10:10] and, it's all taken off since then.

[00:10:14] **David Crabill:** So I think a lot of people, if they got four people on their first day, probably wouldn't feel elated, but I also know that that is a success, that's progress. Is it because I think it sounds like you were selling from the farm, right? So you're just dealing with people who might happen to pass by.

[00:10:31] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, we had a hand painted jumbo muffin sign out front and we have a frontage road next to a highway So you can pull off of the highway and park on the frontage road right by our driveway. And we just set up a tent out there with some tables. And, we were thrilled that anybody would stop with a hand painted jumbo muffin sign.

[00:10:50] We didn't know that anybody would stop.

[00:10:52] **Tristan Hoke:** We're five miles outside of town, but there's nothing else around here. There's not another cafe or anything for another 15 miles.

[00:11:01] **Jenifer Hoke:** we looked up the traffic before we got started. There's an average of 7, 000 cars a day that pass by here.

[00:11:07] **Tristan Hoke:** Granted, they're all doing 90 miles an hour.

[00:11:09] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, that's true. That's why the hand painted muffin sign was large.

[00:11:12] **David Crabill:** All right. So take me through those first few months then, you said that you were doing muffins for just, the whole first year, How did your business ramp up over time?

[00:11:23] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, It was very slow. I was, taking care of who it's multiple system atrophy. It's similar to Parkinson's, but much, much worse. And I had been taking care of her when we started the business for probably 10 months at that point with my dad. Dad was taking care of her, but I would go up and help him probably four days a week.

[00:11:43] And it was really a struggle. well, she had passed in February of 23. And we had taken a few months off. I mean, We started in August and I think we took off from December through April. you know, some of that is it's wintertime and it's holidays. And then we were also taking care of her and dealing with all of that.

[00:12:03] And, then we got started back in April and our customers came back. We were really shocked at how many of them came back. We've been looking for you, we've been looking for you. And they came back and, then in November of 23, we had three people stop in one day that were from Ada. And they were all telling us about this new food truck park And you should get a hold of them And you should go down there and sell and we got a hold of them that next week And we've been going down there.

[00:12:29] The thing has blown up since then. It's absolutely been fabulous.

[00:12:33] **David Crabill:** So did you say that was November of 2023?

[00:12:37] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yes.

[00:12:38] **David Crabill:** Okay, so just like in the last six months or so, adjoining this food truck thing has been rapid expansion, it sounds like.

[00:12:47] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh, yes, very much so

[00:12:50] **David Crabill:** before that, though, from April to November, there's still about half a year window there where it sounds like things were. Progressing, but pretty slow. I mean, what was the feeling like during that period of time? As you're trying to grow the business

[00:13:05] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, we tried to start a farmer's market and my cousin got us, she's in journalism and she got us into Pottawatomie County, paper, and they did like front page spot on us and it was really cool.

[00:13:18] But then our, farmer's market vendors, they would say they were going to show and they wouldn't show. And it was such a massive. And then Scott Hawkins, he came by and, did a spot on us. And we had a bunch more people after that, a bunch more followers and things started progressing, but it was very slow. It was still growing, but it was very slow until we ended up at the food truck park.

[00:13:41] **Tristan Hoke:** Once a week, I would jump on our Facebook page and check followers, check messages and all that kind of stuff. About once a week we would get one new follower, and I'd tell her, and she'd just get this huge smile and, yay, we got one!

[00:13:58] The one follower is a big deal.

[00:14:01] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, but then when the newspaper article came out, we probably got about 50 off of that. And then when Scott posted, we got about 150. And then we started down at the food truck park. We've probably gotten 200 since then. I don't even know.

[00:14:15] **David Crabill:** So you, you weren't just selling, yourself at your farm, right? It sounds like you said you tried starting a farmer's market with other vendors, too.

[00:14:26] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, we did. That was last June or July when we started a little late. For farmers market. And we were just going to try it out and, give it a whirl because we do have so much traffic past here and we figured the more tents we had out here, the more it would look interesting and the more people would stop.

[00:14:43] And, it worked, but we had a bunch of vendors show up the first week and then we had three for the next three weeks. And then we had us and one guy for a couple of weeks and then it got stupid hot and nobody would come out.

[00:14:55] **David Crabill:** So before you started the farmer's market, about how many people would you say were stopping by on a consistent basis to buy things?

[00:15:05] **Jenifer Hoke:** Between one and two dozen.

[00:15:08] **David Crabill:** And was starting your own farmer's market something you'd always wanted to do, or was it just sort of idea to boost traffic for your business.

[00:15:18] **Jenifer Hoke:** We used to think that we would start a farmer's market with our produce. And then when we realized that the cottage food was taking up so much time, and if we had produce, we'd probably use it in our stuff. Then we started searching around. We joined a farmer's market for a little while, maybe four weeks, and got the idea from that.

[00:15:37] If we could get enough people out here we would open up Friday and Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Friday and Saturday was to us. And then Sunday and Monday was supposed to be the farmer's market. And so we thought maybe that's a way to not only boost ourselves, but get some other people out here that have crafts or produce or whatever they want to sell.

[00:15:55] The farmer's market laws in Oklahoma are also pretty low tax. So it was an easy thing to do.

[00:16:01] **David Crabill:** So you said that you obviously try to start your own farmer's market, but it sounds like you also joined an existing farmer's market as well, correct?

[00:16:10] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yes, and that was the reason that we decided to do ours on Sunday and Monday, because hers was on Saturday. We wanted to give people extra days to go and sell their stuff.

[00:16:18] **David Crabill:** And you only did that for a month. I think it was six or seven weeks.

[00:16:24] So was that not as successful as you had hoped?

[00:16:29] **Jenifer Hoke:** Now, in Oklahoma, in July and August, it gets up over a hundred degrees, and so produce vendors don't want their produce out in the sun. We had some people that were doing crafts

[00:16:41] beadwork and glass etching and paintings and stuff like that, and they just couldn't handle the heat.

[00:16:46] **Tristan Hoke:** have a 70 degree rule.

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[00:16:49] **Tristan Hoke:** It's between 30 and 100 degrees. That's when we're out there. Everyone else, basically. It's gotta be perfect. Yeah,

[00:16:56] **Jenifer Hoke:** they're more like between 50 and 80

[00:16:58] **Tristan Hoke:** we're out there in the sleet and the snow and the freezing or it's 102. We're always out there and we've had a lot of people stop just because we're out there.

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[00:17:08] **David Crabill:** So I'm definitely hearing a lot of consistency and a lot of persistence through this. It sounds also like a lot of times where things weren't as easy. What do you think has kept you going?

[00:17:21] **Jenifer Hoke:** I'm stubborn, he's stubborn., we want this to work. You know, They say in a restaurant, if you make it through the first two years, then you're probably okay. Cottage food is not that way. It's going to take three to five years. And we know that. But the general rule of thumb of three to five years, they also say that when the switch flips, then you're good.

[00:17:43] **David Crabill:** Well, It definitely sounds like you were open to trying a lot of different things. You know, obviously you're selling from your farm directly. You tried starting your own farmer's market. You tried selling at another farmer's market. I know eventually This, food truck venue really took things off, but before that, was there anything else that you tried to get yourself out there?

[00:18:03] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, We tried setting up at a marijuana dispensary. That was terrible.

[00:18:09] **David Crabill:** Just like, out on their property, or, was it like a pop up market that they had set up there?

[00:18:15] **Jenifer Hoke:** No, it was actually the dispensary owners stopped by and bought a bunch of stuff. And then down to the end of our, little road, getting back on the highway, came back and bought us out and invited us to come down and set up in front of their dispensary.

[00:18:31] **David Crabill:** And why do you think that didn't work well?

[00:18:34] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, August 17th of 23 would have been our one year anniversary from opening the business. They were all excited. Oh, we're doing an appreciation day. Come out. And it was this whole big thing. We spent a lot of money. and, Come to find out they were giving away free food. You can't do that when you have a food vendor outside.

[00:18:59] So we figured that out after a couple of hours and That they were giving away free food and we had made \$7 that day. will never forget it. so we just packed up our stuff and left like, apparently y'all are too stoned to realize that this is a bad idea. It really left a sour taste in our mouth and we started looking for other avenues.

[00:19:17] **David Crabill:** Well, I definitely can understand why that would not have worked. Was there anything else you tried?

[00:19:25] **Jenifer Hoke:** we did two different farmer's markets, the one that was up in the city, north of the city, the people wanted all the gluten free, sugar free, vegan stuff and they were just a little, little too hoity toity, is, maybe that's the right word? That I use. Butter and eggs and, you know, this is homemade. Now I also do some keto stuff because I've been keto for two years. So I'm sensitive to that idea. It's just not cost effective, generally speaking, to sell that kind of thing exclusively. And, that market, I think we did for four weeks and it

just didn't work out. it's an hour drive. Yeah. Yeah. No, that one was like an hour and 15.

[00:20:05] That was a long ways. A specific startup time, you have to be set, have to be ready, but we have to have access to certain amenities to be able to set up just at minimums. And the people that run that market, they have their own farm right there. It's a beautiful, beautiful place. And they were just, I don't know, they weren't really taking care of their vendors. was just kind of free flowing and Hippie, which, you know, cool. It was just not really our scene. by contrast, when we went down to, the food truck park in Ada was very much our scene, a lot of people who lived on farms and a lot of people who, had similar values to us and, and they very much take care of their vendors.

[00:20:46] And they, They don't allow, competing types of food. So we're the only bakers there, which is amazing. it just really took off.

[00:20:54] **David Crabill:** Obviously you tried a lot of different things. And a lot of them didn't work as well as you'd hoped. Was the feeling during that period of time frustration? were you elated because your business was making progress? What was the feeling like before you found the food truck place?

[00:21:13] **Jenifer Hoke:** I think it was more of a, we're just going to keep going because I know this is going to work.

[00:21:20] **Tristan Hoke:** Just keep struggling and keep your nose to the grindstone. Just keep going.

[00:21:26] **David Crabill:** So what was your first day at the food truck park like?

[00:21:32] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh gosh. it was awful actually, because it was what, 37 degrees and sleeting and we got a call that morning, we're not going to open today because it's cold and sleeting. Nobody's going to show up. And I was like, wait a minute, I got a thousand dollars worth of product here.

[00:21:49] You can't just call me in the morning, this stuff spoils. You can't do that. We've got to sell this somewhere. And the guy that was managing it at the time called the owners and explained the situation because they all, they had actually heard of us, which was amazing. And they all really wanted us out there and they're like, okay fine.

[00:22:08] We're going to open, we're going to open. And I think we did pretty well that day. I paid for a fuel in the first 30 minutes. Oh yeah. One of the other vendors came and spent over a hundred dollars. We had other people show up just showed up because we were there.

[00:22:22] **Tristan Hoke:** Some of our followers are actually from southern Oklahoma and you have a lot of people that if we marked off that we're within like 20 or 30 minutes

[00:22:32] where they are, they will come directly to us instead of having to drive an hour and a half. It just, it's opportunity.

[00:22:39] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah. So we had a few people that day that had already known who we were and showed up. And, you know, as far as salesmen, it was pretty good day.

[00:22:47] **David Crabill:** so what, I guess, what was your, first day at that place, like when it was not sleeting and you had favorable selling conditions,

[00:22:57] **Jenifer Hoke:** That was actually the next day, the next day, for whatever reason, the sleeting moved out and it was like 50 degrees, something like that. And We had two food trucks that were open besides us because they had just opened in early November, the food truck part, and I think when we got in there, it was.

[00:23:18] late November, early December, and so the fact that there were two food trucks that were somewhat known in the area, their people came in, they had the bar open, which it's an open air bar, and all of the vendors and the bartenders were all saying, Hey, you need to go check out the Drunken Chef.

[00:23:35] You need to go check out the Drunken Chef. And it was an amazing day. Not our best sales day, but close. And that was just the second day there.

[00:23:43] **David Crabill:** when you had that first weekend there, did you feel like, oh, this is it? Like we found it.

[00:23:51] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah. That really solidified the second weekend. Because us and all of the vendors, we sat around a fire pit that we had brought and talked probably an hour and a half, two hours because it, slowed down. I mean, Dark comes early that time of year. And so it really slowed down and we all just decided to stay out there and kind of get to know each other because it was a new place and we were all, new to each other.

[00:24:15] And it really, I guess, solidified our sense of community out there, which was something that we had been seeking, especially trying to open the farmer's market out here. We wanted that sense of community, of people helping each other. And, The burger place buys their onions from the produce place and, you know, that kind of thing.

[00:24:30] And everybody trades and, That second weekend I think was when we really went, okay, yeah, this is where we want to be.

[00:24:35] **David Crabill:** Now, did you say it was a new venue?

[00:24:39] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, they just opened in early November of 23.

[00:24:44] **David Crabill:** And you call it a food truck venue. Were you selling out of some kind of truck or trailer, or were you selling from a pop up tent?

[00:24:54] **Jenifer Hoke:** Firm and Tent, we're still selling from a tent. We hope to get our trailer done and maybe be able to use that so that when it rains, it's not as sketchy. But, I mean, we've sold out there in the rain in the tent. It's just, you do what you got to do.

[00:25:10] **Tristan Hoke:** We're on our fifth one.

[00:25:14] **David Crabill:** Now, I know that you started selling muffins. When you got to the food truck park, what was your menu looking like?

[00:25:21] **Jenifer Hoke:** let's see, I had three or four higher end muffins. I did the strawberry cheesecake, banana pudding, probably the apple cobbler with caramel and a lemon poppy seed that has since morphed into a lemon velvet poppy seed that is hugely popular. Fresh blueberry and gigantic oatmeal cream pies. They're five inches in diameter and probably an inch and a quarter thick.

[00:25:43] **Tristan Hoke:** We bring 20, we sell 20.

[00:25:45] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh yeah, they sell out every time. We do some cookie bars. you know, a lot of these these cottage food people they think that you have to have this pretty round cookie No.

[00:25:57] I cook my nutty peanut butter bars and my toll road cookies in a sheet pan and cut them up. Everybody loves them. Oh, and I do fudge.

[00:26:08] Gourmet fudge, but that just started like two, three months ago.

[00:26:10] **David Crabill:** You said you're selling out of the cream pies. What prevents you from bringing more of those each time?

[00:26:18] **Jenifer Hoke:** They are very labor intensive. We've been working on efficiency to make them faster because you have to make them in rings and then you have to, it's just a lot of prep, a lot of prep. I did figure out how to bake them faster using the convection, which is great. Put some nice crust on them.

[00:26:35] I figured out how to do the, cause you have to push them down in the rings so that they're more flat.

[00:26:41] **Tristan Hoke:** Literally handmade.

[00:26:42] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah. And so I figured out some faster ways of doing that because it was taking me probably four hours to do 14 of them. And now it's down to about two. So it's getting faster to where we can have more of them and have them more often.

[00:26:57] **David Crabill:** So, Jenifer, are you the one who makes everything for the market? Or, Tristan, you're involved in the cooking too.

[00:27:07] **Jenifer Hoke:** He doesn't do the baking, but he has his own stuff. He does smoked spices. And so we take like paprika and garlic and salt and pepper and chili powder and cayenne and we've got a whole range of stuff and he smokes them on an old, like primitive smoker and we sell those, by the ounce basically.

[00:27:25] And I also use those to make a cracker mix and we sell a lot of that too.

[00:27:31] **Tristan Hoke:** Mostly, I do, uh, the logistics part of it, making sure the trucks are running, making sure that, uh, electronics, electric, plumbing, ovens, Basically that she can do the baking side of it with no hardships, other than what is actually involved.

[00:27:47] **David Crabill:** So, what

[00:27:49] would you say are your best sellers? Is it the muffins?

[00:27:54] **Jenifer Hoke:** The muffins and the oatmeal cream pies, and then the, cracker mixes. Right in there.

[00:27:59] **David Crabill:** Now, what about pricing? Where did you start out at and where are you today?

[00:28:05] **Jenifer Hoke:** Unfortunately, there's been a lot of inflation, so we started out selling muffins that were 3 and 4 when we were only doing muffins, and they're huge. They're gigantic muffins. And we only had one lady that griped about the price I can get four of these at Walmart for 3.99, and I said, then go to Walmart. You literally, we've looked it up. You cannot get anything this quality with this kind of recipe any closer than New York City. We don't mess around with, cake mix.

[00:28:34] We do any of that stuff and write all the recipes. And, we do everything we can to make it as high quality as possible while still making a profit.

[00:28:43] **Tristan Hoke:** Our most expensive one is seven.

[00:28:45] **Jenifer Hoke:** the July 4th festival, we're going to have one that's \$8.

[00:28:49] that one's going to be a strawberry cheesecake muffin with a blueberry cheesecake filling. And raspberry drizzle on top with star shaped sprinkles. So it'd be a red, white, and blue,

[00:29:00] **David Crabill:** Do you find that the premium and higher priced muffins sell better than your basic muffins?

[00:29:07] **Jenifer Hoke:** especially when they're new. Yes. The first time that I did a, 7 muffin was my white forest. And that was probably two months ago. And it's white chocolate and rasp, or not raspberry, dark cherry, tart cherry, a white chocolate whipped cream, raspberry drizzle on top. And nobody even batted an eye at the price.

[00:29:29] Not even a little.

[00:29:30] **David Crabill:** So do you add flavors just for that reason alone? Because you are trying to, do something new, something that'll be exciting for customers? Or is there any other reason for mixing it up?

[00:29:44] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh no, I think people like the new stuff. We have some, like our lemon velvet poppy seed is a perennial favorite. That recipe just got really refined probably three months ago. But yeah, I always want to mix it up.

[00:29:58] **David Crabill:** Now, what about packaging? Are you presenting these muffins like in high end packaging, or what are you doing there?

[00:30:06] **Jenifer Hoke:** In Oklahoma, you can sell from either prepackaged or you can do it out of what they call a bulk bin. That changes up your signage a little bit, what's required, makes it simpler. So we actually display them on a fancy cake plate and then things like, a cheesecake muffin where the, cheesecake filling has to be refrigerated, we will fill those on demand.

[00:30:28] So the ones that are on the plate, they don't get sold they've been in the elements of the heat, whatever. But, you know, somebody will see the one on the plate and go, Oh, I want a cheesecake or, Oh, I want this or that. And we will go ahead and fill those on demand. And then it just goes into a paper sack. and nobody cares.

[00:30:46] **David Crabill:** so you said that you have bumped up pricing over time because of inflation. Has there been any pushback when you did that?

[00:30:55] **Jenifer Hoke:** Not a bit. I've been kind of shocked.

[00:31:00] **David Crabill:** How do you determine which price to settle on?

[00:31:03] **Jenifer Hoke:** I generally run with a, 60 to 75 percent profit, but that's just raw profit. I don't figure in like hours of work or overhead, things like that. It's really just the ingredients what that would cost per muffin. And I go from there.

[00:31:21] **David Crabill:** So you're really talking about a 35 percent ingredient cost, and that's pretty standard, I would say. So as you've been selling at this food truck place, Did it just take off immediately and has stayed there? have you been growing a lot in the last six months?

[00:31:40] **Jenifer Hoke:** The weather in Oklahoma is fickle, as you may have heard. it's been kind of a challenge through the spring to make sure it wasn't storming and tornadoes coming. We have weekends where it's beautiful outside and we break our sales records.

[00:31:56] We did that two days in a row about a month ago. Broke our sales records by a lot and then broke it the next day by a lot. And then it's kind of leveled off. I think we will have some days this summer that we'll break them again. But as far as the followers and getting our name out there, it has been nothing but a positive.

[00:32:14] **David Crabill:** So when you say breaking records, I'm just curious about how much are you selling either quantity wise or dollar value?

[00:32:24] **Jenifer Hoke:** our average, I mean, if you want to know dollars, Our average is about \$350 a day. When we're at the food truck park we broke a record, it was over \$500 on a Friday and over \$600 on a Saturday.

[00:32:35] **David Crabill:** And how often are you going out to the food truck place to sell.

[00:32:40] **Jenifer Hoke:** We go Fridays and Saturdays.

[00:32:43] **Tristan Hoke:** Weather permitting.

[00:32:46] **David Crabill:** So sometimes, you're breaking over a thousand dollars a week from sales there. Are you still selling elsewhere during the week?

[00:32:55] **Jenifer Hoke:** Occasionally. We are currently working on, building a new kitchen would take it out of our teeny tiny house kitchen and put it on the back porch, which is still a house kitchen and allowed by Oklahoma law. And that would put it into an approximately 14 by 20 foot space. Where that would be just our cottage food kitchen, and then we can increase production enough that we will probably be once again selling out in front of the house, but for right now we just can't keep up.

[00:33:21] **Tristan Hoke:** That'll be two to three hundred percent production increase.

[00:33:25] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, and we've talked about even going into wholesale.

[00:33:28] **David Crabill:** Okay, so you're definitely feeling it when it comes to your kitchen space. Is that sort of the bottleneck for you right now

[00:33:38] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yes it is. It's a one buck kitchen.

[00:33:43] **David Crabill:** in this kitchen you're building out? Is that just a recent development? Is that? Come about because of the success you've been finding it at the food truck place, or, is that just something you've, been eyeing for a while?

[00:33:56] **Jenifer Hoke:** We've talked about it, for probably a year. We also have a two story detached garage that we had talked about putting a kitchen in. but it wasn't even the food truck park as much as it was when we started getting these other calls and requests. To go and set up at this festival or that festival, people who have had our food, people who, you know, we've been recommended to, and that was when we were like, okay, if we're going to start doing festivals and stuff, we're going to have to be able to increase production.

[00:34:25] but it's really just been the last week and a half, two weeks that we've been actually drawing out the plans and stuff like that.

[00:34:32] **David Crabill:** And when do you sort of feel like this will be done and you'll be able to expand your production?

[00:34:38] **Jenifer Hoke:** We're hoping in two months, I've got. medical stuff coming up at the end of July. And we're hoping August, we will be able to finish up the kitchen and have it ready in time for our big event in September.

[00:34:53] It's a, barking waters, music festival in we woke up Last year they had collective soul. We're not sure who they're going to have this year, but I figured if they got, that well known of a name. Last year, it'll probably be pretty good this year.

[00:35:06] **David Crabill:** Did you sell there last year?

[00:35:08] **Jenifer Hoke:** no. We got messaged out of the blue about three weeks ago. So are you finding the opportunities are coming your way?

[00:35:19] **David Crabill:** Are wholesalers reaching out to you now and you just can't accommodate it?

[00:35:23] **Jenifer Hoke:** We had one wholesaler out of Jersey reach out, uh, well, retailer wanting to us to sell him wholesale smoked spices because we don't add anything to the smoked spices. we ordered some smoked Himalayan salt from one of the places where we order raw spices. And their stuff has added yeast and all kinds of funkiness to it.

[00:35:45] Not nearly as good as ours. We don't do any of that. Have not had anybody reach out to wholesale the muffins or cookies yet. But the shipping on the muffins is insane.

[00:35:54] It's just not feasible. But if we could do local. Then maybe that would be something that we could accommodate.

[00:36:00] **David Crabill:** Yeah, because one of the unique things about Oklahoma is that they do allow interstate shipping, right? I mean, it's kind of a gray area in terms of which states you can ship to, but, sounds like you've looked at it, but you're not really doing it.

[00:36:14] **Jenifer Hoke:** No, it's just, the cost is prohibitive because each muffin weighs about a pound. And you have to get them there, especially something that's filled. You'd have to get them there in, ice packs and things like that. So that the cream cheese didn't spoil or whatever. And they can't be sitting on a loading dock somewhere in the sun.

[00:36:32] **Tristan Hoke:** That's a one day shipping, kind of

[00:36:35] like they do with,

[00:36:36] **Jenifer Hoke:** Organ deliveries, organ transplant, stuff like that. got to stay

[00:36:40] **Tristan Hoke:** cold and it's got to get there quick.

[00:36:41] **Jenifer Hoke:** Obviously people are going to spend more for organ transplants than they are for muffins.

[00:36:45] **Tristan Hoke:** Six muffins.

[00:36:47] **Jenifer Hoke:** Uh, I looked at 76 two years ago.

[00:36:50] **Tristan Hoke:** USPS was 270 just for shipping on six muffins.

[00:36:56] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, And UPS was something like 76.

[00:36:59] Yeah. I mean, it was, just

[00:37:00] insane. I mean,

[00:37:01] **Tristan Hoke:** It was more than the muffins cost.

[00:37:02] **David Crabill:** You're talking about doing ice packs and trying to ship your cream cheese items. What about just your more shelf stable muffins, that don't necessarily need to be kept cold?

[00:37:15] **Jenifer Hoke:** They're still very heavy.

[00:37:18] **Tristan Hoke:** But it's still only a three day shelf life.

[00:37:21] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, well, no, it's more like a five day shelf life, but you wouldn't want them shipped more than two days.

[00:37:26] **Tristan Hoke:** But it comes back to our standards. I don't want them to be sitting on a truck for three days, and then you have one day to eat them.

[00:37:35] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, or they taste stale. Then you're never going to get a repeat customer, and it's just not worth it.

[00:37:40] **Tristan Hoke:** And nobody's going to pay a hundred dollars for six muffins.

[00:37:45] **Jenifer Hoke:** Especially when the muffins are, they sell stable ones are like four or 5 a piece.

[00:37:48] I mean,

[00:37:49] That's just silly.

[00:37:50] **David Crabill:** The shipping costs you're citing, those sound like maybe retail rates for one day shipping. thinking like, For USPS Priority Mail, with business rates. I would think, you know, for a six pound package within Oklahoma, we'd probably be looking more in the ten to twenty dollar range.

[00:38:12] **Jenifer Hoke:** That could be possible

[00:38:13] **David Crabill:** and then If you froze them before you, ship them. That would give you a little bit of extra time.

[00:38:20] **Jenifer Hoke:** That's true.

[00:38:21] **David Crabill:** I mean, I could see there probably would be a way to make it work and it'd be at least something to test out, but I do want to make sure that you were looking at the business shipping prices, because.

[00:38:31] it is amazing how much less expensive certain types of shipping can be if you go with the business rates

[00:38:39] **Jenifer Hoke:** okay. We'll look into that.

[00:38:41] **David Crabill:** One place to start looking is Pirate Ship.

[00:38:44] It's a very, popular website for shipping, and there's a lot of shipping services out there for businesses, but they'll basically get you, the discounted shipping rates with no up charges, I think you'd be surprised by the costs and the rates there. So priority mail, for your non refrigerated items, it might be something to look into.

[00:39:06] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah. Cause we've got family in Texas and Missouri that are just dying for us to ship them some muffins.

[00:39:10] **David Crabill:** Now, I know you're obviously relying a lot on this food truck, venue for your sales and your marketing. Do you guys do more marketing on top of that?

[00:39:22] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh yes. Yeah. We do Facebook every time we open, generally pictures of everything that we're selling that day. Cause I do like to change it up. And we've tried to get on Instagram, but. Really technologically savvy. So

[00:39:37] **Tristan Hoke:** But we do have a lot of the other vendors, especially like Jeremy, he'll do a video post and post everybody's stuff.

[00:39:46] **Jenifer Hoke:** we have a lot of the vendors that, you know, like I can share and. They had a drone company come out and do a commercial for the food truck park that included us and we're not really pushing that right now because we're trying to increase our efficiency enough that we can keep up with demand.

[00:40:00] **David Crabill:** As I was perusing your Facebook feed, I noticed there's no pictures of you two whatsoever.

[00:40:10] **Tristan Hoke:** We're not selling ourselves, we are selling the product.

[00:40:13] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah.

[00:40:15] **David Crabill:** Do you find that people who come to your booth at the market, do you think they're just simply attracted by the product? Or do you feel like they come because of you guys?

[00:40:27] **Jenifer Hoke:** The ones that have met us before, a lot of times they come because of us. Because they'll see us over there and go, Ooh, what'd you get today? But the people that have never even heard of us. They just see, there's a cake plate and there's all kinds of stuff on this table and what do they have?

[00:40:43] I don't think it really has anything to do with us. I've got blue and purple and silver hair and he's got a big old beard. And we're just,

[00:40:53] **Tristan Hoke:** I am not the prettiest fellow.

[00:40:54] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh, you're very handsome. I would never have thought about marketing us.

[00:40:59] **David Crabill:** think it depends on how your markets go. And if you find that people are coming back because of you guys. They like you and they want to support you, and that's an indication that the business is sustainable because of you too. But it sounds like it's, working and that the products are popular enough that, people are just coming back for those.

[00:41:22] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah. We have people that show up on the, especially. The weeks when we don't have oatmeal cream pies. You got any oatmeal cream pies? You got that banana pudding muffin? They come over and ask for specific things and they're repeat customers. Cause obviously they've had them before, but they're not coming back for us.

[00:41:40] I think it's much more for the product.

[00:41:41] **David Crabill:** As you think back over the past year and a half, are there any memories or stories that stand out to you?

[00:41:49] **Jenifer Hoke:** I would say the guy that was walking to Louisiana, that we were actually set up in front of the house and, there was this guy that

came walking by, and he comes walking over. Old stick with knapsack on the stick. Yeah, yeah, the whole nine yards looked like a hobo. And he walked by and stopped and asked, Okay, so I'm going to, where was he going, Baton Rouge?

[00:42:11] Shreveport. Shreveport. Tristan used to live in Louisiana, and so he knew exactly how to tell him to go. And the guy's like, Oh, thank you, thank you. And he walks off down the road, and I was like, Babe, He's walking where? To Shreveport. And I went, he needs calories. Go give him an oatmeal cream pie and a couple of muffins and some cookies and a water or something.

[00:42:32] And so we bagged up a bunch of stuff and he drove down the road, caught him, gave him a bunch of stuff. That was very, very memorable. I loved that. It was just, it was wonderful.

[00:42:41] **David Crabill:** Well, It sounds like you guys have had, you kind of found your way, found success, uh, persisted through the tough times. What do you feel like is challenging to you today?

[00:42:55] **Jenifer Hoke:** I think my biggest challenge is coming up with new muffin flavors. We had one of the vendor's kids. Just a couple of days ago. Oh, you should make a pineapple muffin. I literally made a pineapple muffin a week ago, Oh, she'd do a peach cobbler. Yeah, I I have the recipe in my box it's kind of a challenge to come up with new and interesting flavors that people won't go. Oh, wait, what?

[00:43:21] **Tristan Hoke:** That's also why we are called the drunken chef. Because we both talk to each other usually over a couple of beers or a glass of whiskey. We bounce the idea back and forth and it's like the guy climbing up between the two walls. You keep climbing up until the idea is perfect.

[00:43:41] **Jenifer Hoke:** That's how we came up with the strawberry ghost pepper brownies. It was just a back and forth. And we ended up coming up with this brownie that is fabulous. It's got a little bit of heat to it. It's got a little bit of fruit to it.

[00:43:53] Cream, chocolate. What could go wrong with that?

[00:43:55] **David Crabill:** Have you gotten to the point where you're bringing back flavors? You know, you introduce them for a season and then, you know, now you're, you're coming back to them.

[00:44:08] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh yeah, I actually have an entire section in my recipe box. That is seasonal muffins, because out here, we don't live too far from Stratford, which is very famous for peaches. So the peach season is generally June. The pear, actually comes from our pear tree.

[00:44:25] That'll be depending. I mean, Spring came early this year, so I'm not really sure, probably a month out at least, I'm actually looking at the pear tree right now and I can see little pears that are about silver dollar size. We do the pear muffin every year. And pumpkin pie.

[00:44:40] It comes back around Thanksgiving time. And what did I do? The pumpkin spice latte. So that's Halloween time when you kind of introduce that back in. yeah, It's definitely been very interesting with the seasonal stuff.

[00:44:54] **Tristan Hoke:** And because we are called the drunken chef, we are not dedicated to any one specific thing.

[00:45:01] we do what we want. And, yeah, we're known for our muffins, sure.

[00:45:06] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yeah, I can't imagine an opening without muffins. That would not be a thing. Nah,

[00:45:09] **Tristan Hoke:** it's always good.

[00:45:12] **David Crabill:** The name The Drunken Chef came from your time at the bar, which, you know, has long since passed. it sounds like your name still guides the direction of your business today?

[00:45:23] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh, sure. Yeah, and people get a kick out of it. Why are you called the Drunken Chef? We met in a bar, and then we first cooked in a bar, and that's when we came up with the name, and it just stuck.

[00:45:33] **David Crabill:** you said that a current struggle is that, you know, coming up with new muffin flavors. Do you think that you'll eventually get to the point where you have enough recipes where you can just kind of rotate them in and out, and that won't be a challenge for you?

[00:45:47] Do you feel like you'll always be, compelled to come up with a brand new flavor that you've never done before?

[00:45:53] **Jenifer Hoke:** Oh, I'll always feel compelled. Without a doubt.

[00:45:57] **David Crabill:** Tristan, how about you? What's, uh, would you say are the challenges that you're currently facing in the business?

[00:46:04] **Tristan Hoke:** Well, It's running the farm. Getting all that taken care of, fixing machines, taking care of the land is the forefront, and then making sure that she's all set up so that all the ovens work, all the sinks work, she's got her tables, everything's clean, she's got lighting, keeping the mosquitoes at bay,

[00:46:26] making sure the cats and dogs don't get in the house, and the list goes on and on and on.

[00:46:32] **David Crabill:** It sounds like for your first year plus of business, the challenge was finding customers. Would you say that's not a challenge currently, because of this food truck place?

[00:46:43] **Jenifer Hoke:** Yes. I think opportunities are coming our way because we went down there. The day when the three people from Ada showed up And those three people that all told us about the food truck park. I felt like it was the old joke about, the guy whose house is starting to flood and the sheriff comes by in the truck and he says, Oh, I'm going to take you to safety.

[00:47:03] And the guy says, no, God's got me. And then he's up on the porch and the boat comes by, No, God's got me. And then he's. he's up on the roof and the helicopter comes by and No, God's got me and then he drowns and he gets up to the pearly gates Peter says, Why are you here?

[00:47:18] Well, Why didn't God come and save me? Well, I sent you a truck, a boat, and a helicopter. Why didn't you take them? That's how it felt that day. We had three different people show up and we felt like that was where we were supposed to go and it has worked out for us phenomenally. So I think that if somebody is looking at doing a cottage food business, you have to go where you're led and you have to listen to what is being put in front of you.

[00:47:44] And I think that's probably the most important lesson that I've learned.

[00:47:47] **David Crabill:** As you look ahead, I know you have to listen for the right thing and where you'll be led next, but, where would you like to go? What are your goals? or where do you see yourself in a year or two?

[00:48:00] **Jenifer Hoke:** Well, Hopefully in the new kitchen and in Oklahoma, cottage food law says that you can only do \$75, 000. Worth of business per

year. And we may have to split this into more than one business. And so he can do the spices on one and I can do the other stuff on the other. And we have the homestead and we'd like to expand our fruit crops and, be able to use those in the muffins.

[00:48:27] Growing blueberries in Oklahoma is incredibly hard. We've tried it twice and it does not work. And we had a bunch of fruit trees that died. So we'd like to get to the point where the farm produce is supporting the muffins more than it is now. And we're actually running two different businesses, so that we can get to a point where we can help other people.

[00:48:46] We can hire other people and pay them well. That's the American dream.

[00:48:50] **David Crabill:** Do you have an end goal in mind? Like, you say you want to hire other people. How big would you ideally like to take this?

[00:48:58] **Jenifer Hoke:** I think maybe six employees would probably be max.

[00:49:03] **Tristan Hoke:** what we're able to do in the areas that we have, we can have up to 20 max, but

[00:49:10] **Jenifer Hoke:** I mean,

[00:49:11] here at the farm, maybe six employees. If we were utilizing people to sell at different farmers markets and stuff like that, then maybe we'd have up to 20. And at that point we'd have to go to a commercial kitchen and that would be a whole another set of problems,

[00:49:25] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like that's still a possibility, or do you feel like as you've gotten into this that you are less interested in that?

[00:49:34] **Jenifer Hoke:** We had actually talked about doing a food truck even as, as recent as a month ago. And what we've noticed is that generally speaking, not all, but generally speaking, food truck people are not as, community oriented. I'll put it that way as cottage food, people, cottage food, people tend to help each other out and they tend to, share and there are certainly exceptions, but. Just in a general sense, the cottage food people have a better, kindness towards each other and we really like that.

[00:50:06] **David Crabill:** Why do you think that is?

[00:50:08] **Jenifer Hoke:** Maybe because it's so home based, I mean that's the definition, so being that you work at home and you know other people are working at home and, you know, it takes over your living room and your dining room and everything and we all know that that's how that works, whereas in a food truck You're just working there. It doesn't take over your life as much as the cottage food industry does. So there's more compassion.

[00:50:34] **David Crabill:** I know that you said that, You have to listen for the right next step as you think back on what you've learned over the past year and a half. Is there anything else that you would recommend to your, other fellow cottage food entrepreneurs?

[00:50:49] **Jenifer Hoke:** Always listen to the customer, but the customer is not always right. Listen to the customer as far as constructive feedback. This muffin wasn't quite right. This muffin was a little weird, this whatever, cookie, whatever you're making, and then also perseverance. If you have something that people love, then persevere.

[00:51:07] **David Crabill:** Well, Jenifer and Tristan, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing your story with us. If people would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:51:20] **Jenifer Hoke:** We are the Drunken Chef on Facebook. Usually you have to search Drunken Chef OK, and then it'll pop up. It's a weird little, graphic that says Drunken Chef with a Drunken Chef hat on it. that's really the best way to find us.

[00:51:37] **David Crabill:** Well, I will put links to your stuff in the show notes and thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:51:46] **Jenifer Hoke:** thank you, David.

[00:51:47] **Tristan Hoke:** Appreciate you.

[00:51:50] **David Crabill:** that wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:51:53] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/117.

[00:52:00] And if you are enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be a long

review, but it's truly the best way to support this show and will help others like you find this podcast.

[00:52:12] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini courseware, 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.

[00:52:24] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.