

Jenn Bowersock with Jenn's Backstube

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 Jenn Bowersock.

[00:00:11] But first, ConvertKit is rebranding to Kit and recently made a pretty big announcement that is great news for cottage food entrepreneurs.

[00:00:21] If you've listened to the show for a while, you know that I am a big fan of using ConvertKit to build an email marketing list. ConvertKit has always had a great free tier for their platform, but now it is even better. Now you can use ConvertKit for free for up to 10,000 email subscribers, plus they allow you to use one automation sequence for free as well.

[00:00:44] Now if that doesn't mean much to you right now, trust me when I say that it is by far the best free email marketing option that I have ever seen. So, If you still haven't hopped on the email marketing bandwagon, now is a great time to do so. To get started and learn more, you can watch my free email marketing tutorial at forrager.com/email.

[00:01:06] All right, so I have Jenn on the show today. She lives in Sidney, Ohio and sells pretzels, donuts, and other authentic German baked goods with her cottage food business, Jenn's Backstube. Jenn was born and raised in Germany and has fond memories from her childhood of bakeries on nearly every corner. And now she is bringing a little slice of Germany to her corner of the states. And although she's only been in business for just one year, It's been far more successful than she ever imagined. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Jenn. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:48] **Jenn Bowersock:** Hi, thanks for having me. I'm excited.

[00:01:52] **David Crabill:** Jenn, I know it has only been a year. I think just a year ago you started your business. If I could have told you a year ago that you would be where you are today, what would you have said?

[00:02:04] **Jenn Bowersock:** You're crazy. Absolutely crazy. This has been a real rollercoaster of a journey, an exciting one. I would have never expected this at all.

[00:02:17] **David Crabill:** Well, can you take me back? How did your business journey get started?

[00:02:23] **Jenn Bowersock:** So, I've been an entrepreneur since probably 2018 2019, when it comes to doing things from home, and, I was doing seamstress at that point, but back in August, my parents came for a visit from Germany, and they really noticed that I was really struggling to keep afloat with that business, because the economy had changed so much, there was no real demand for that anymore.

[00:02:47] So my dad was like why don't you start baking, and come from your German heritage instead of making things that you can get readily available here. So we started with pretzels in August testing them. And then by September we were at the Sydney farmer's market, finishing off the farmer's market year there for a couple of weeks.

[00:03:09] And it was. Yeah, it was a hit and it's been growing since.

[00:03:14] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I noticed that your business really took off. Now, you said you were a seamstress, and can you expand on that a little bit? Like, What were you selling, and how were you selling them?

[00:03:26] **Jenn Bowersock:** So I focused on custom work, things like curtains, um, furniture, upholstery coverings and things like that, pillows, but we also did things like, aprons, you know, those bowl cozies people like to use, basically anything that I could get my hands on that, would run through my machine tried myself out on.

[00:03:45] So that's really what we did. So that's something that we took to the farmer's market as well.

[00:03:49] **David Crabill:** And was that Always like a local business, like how do people find you? Yeah,

[00:03:56] **Jenn Bowersock:** it was a local business. It actually really started off, expanding when the pandemic hit, when we started making masks for friends. And one of our friends owns a local business and he wore it for work, so all his clients saw him wearing it. And so that's how my clientele really started growing, from there.

[00:04:15] The masks turned into curtains and into couch cushion covers and those kinds of things. So yeah, it's been interesting.

[00:04:22] **David Crabill:** Now I saw somewhere that, I think even before that, you also ran a daycare, which is kind of entrepreneurial too, is that correct?

[00:04:32] **Jenn Bowersock:** I did, I had a license in home daycare, which started in 2015.

[00:04:38] **David Crabill:** And why did you decide to start a daycare?

[00:04:41] **Jenn Bowersock:** I actually went through a divorce shortly before that and due to custody, one of our friends was watching our kids and she said, why don't you look into becoming a childcare provider? That way you can stay home with the kids and still make an income. So that is exactly what I did. That's how the in-home daycare started and we ran it for, Five years.

[00:05:07] **David Crabill:** So you definitely had some experience working with customers and dealing with products by the time you started your cottage food business. What are some of the skills that you feel like you brought into this business venture?

[00:05:22] **Jenn Bowersock:** I've always loved working with my hands, whether it was, with my sewing machine, woodworking, or anything like that. I've always loved cooking, and baking, and taking care of other people, feeding them, those kinds of things. So just having that Was already something that gave me a start into that whole business.

[00:05:41] **David Crabill:** And I know your dad was a big part of starting this business. Why Wasn't this something that you had considered earlier?

[00:05:51] **Jenn Bowersock:** I always heard so many horror stories about working with the health department, so that is something I really, really never, ever wanted to deal with. And guess where I'm at now?

[00:06:01] **David Crabill:** Now, I think technically you do work with the ag department under the cottage food realm, correct?

[00:06:07] **Jenn Bowersock:** I work with Ag and I work with the health department now. I work out of a commercial kitchen as well, on top of what I do here from home. So we actually just went through the licensing as a commercial bakery at that commercial facility. So we work with both the health department and Ag.

[00:06:25] **David Crabill:** When you say you work in a kitchen, is that another job or is that for this business?

[00:06:31] **Jenn Bowersock:** It's for this business. One of our local kitchens has opened it up so that some of us entrepreneurs can use her kitchen for things that we can't do from home.

[00:06:43] **David Crabill:** Now, Ohio's actually pretty unique in that they're one of the very few states that has a home bakery license which allows you to sell baked goods, so is that something that you consider getting, we actually were able to get both the commercial and the home bakery license on the same day, which was pretty exciting because now we can make everything from home, that we weren't able to make before. Previously to that. so

[00:07:14] was this a pretty recent development?

[00:07:16] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes, we actually weren't aware of some of the things that we could not bring to the farmer's market without being fully licensed as either a home bakery or a commercial bakery. The health department reached out to us and worked with us. Within two weeks we were able to take care of all of the discrepancies, basically, that would have not allowed us to continue making things like our cheesecakes and pudding filled, donuts and things like that, the crepe that we make.

[00:07:46] So, Those are all things that we're now finally able to make without any issues.

[00:07:51] **David Crabill:** Now, you said you got both the home bakery license and the commercial license. What are the restrictions under the home bakery license that required you to get the commercial license as well?

[00:08:04] **Jenn Bowersock:** When I actually, Make things like beer cheese or like a cream cheese dip for my pretzels or anything like that. Those are actually items that you are not permitted to make under the home bakery license. So if you want to make anything like that, you will have to be In a commercial facility.

[00:08:25] Now because this commercial kitchen was not licensed the way we needed it to be, we had to get our own personal license through an AG at that kitchen. But yeah, that covers everything now. So that's wonderful.

[00:08:36] **David Crabill:** Got it. Yeah, so the home bakery license is obviously just for baked goods, and therefore anything that falls outside of that realm wouldn't be allowed.

[00:08:46] So,

[00:08:46] Were you just unaware of the Home Bakery License? Like, Was that what prevented you from trying to get it sooner?

[00:08:53] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yeah, it was that as well as, just trying to figure out how to fit it into our schedule. We didn't realize how easy it was actually to be able to go get that, home bakery license,

[00:09:05] **David Crabill:** Now, one thing I've always wondered, I know that you sell things that contain bacon, does the Home Bakery License in Ohio actually allow you to sell items with meat on them?

[00:09:19] **Jenn Bowersock:** Through the home bakery license. Yes. my items have all been approved through ag, And, the only thing that I know that I have to keep cool or refrigerated is actually my cheesecakes. So, Even the bacon is acceptable there because it actually is a shelf stable product when you purchase it from the store because it's already the bacon bits.

[00:09:40] **David Crabill:** I see. so they're pretty, unique in that way. There's not many other states that allow you to have that kind of flexibility from home. And if you lived in another state, or if Ohio didn't have the home bakery license law, do you think at this point you would just be fully commercial?

[00:10:00] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yeah, I would have to be fully commercial at that point. I would have to make everything out of that kitchen in order to be able to sell it.

[00:10:07] **David Crabill:** Well, I mean, the alternative, right, would just be to limit what you sell.

[00:10:14] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes, that would have been the alternative, but that would have been sad.

[00:10:16] **David Crabill:** Now, while Ohio is very flexible in many ways, one restriction they have is not allowing you to use any commercial ovens, right? Like, I think you can only use one oven or one double oven for residential use.

[00:10:34] Is that Something that has been a bottleneck for you?

[00:10:37] **Jenn Bowersock:** Honestly, not to this point. My home oven has been doing wonderful. for my standards and for what I'm doing right now with the volume I need, no, my home oven's not been a restriction.

[00:10:50] **David Crabill:** Well, we haven't even talked yet about what you sell. Can you just share some of what you started out with when you started this business?

[00:11:00] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yeah, so what we actually exclusively started with is authentic German lye pretzels. So it's basically just a standard bread dough, so to say, which fell completely under cottage law. So there was no need to get any kind of home bakery license for it. But we then quickly started to play a little bit more with some of the other ingredients.

[00:11:22] And, this year at Farmer's Market, we brought out our. Bacon and cheese pretzels, our jalapeno and cheese pretzels. We also make pretzel bites. They come in all kinds of different flavors as well and seasonings, including cinnamon sugar, which a lot of our customers enjoy. Our cheesecakes, there's a variety of those and they are German cheesecakes.

[00:11:43] So they're a lot different from what people are used to here with the cream cheese. We don't use any of that at all. yeah, I try to dabble in all kinds of things. Our newest thing now is, called plunderteig, which is like a croissant dough, but it's not, quite as many layers as you would find in a French croissant dough, so it's more fluffy but it's really good and, Been received really well at the farmer's market too. Now,

[00:12:06] **David Crabill:** I know that all of your items are German focused. Why is that?

[00:12:11] **Jenn Bowersock:** I was born and raised there, so those are just some of the things that I truly miss here. when you go to a bakery here, you find a lot of great baked goods, however they are so sweet. You really can't eat a lot of it or tolerate a lot of it. Even a lot of people that, like in my friendship circle, that have diabetes or other kinds of things really can't enjoy a sweet treat like that or anything like this that we are used to here in the states. Also trying to use really basic ingredients, flour that doesn't have any enrichments in it and things like that. So I try to get as much stuff here that is locally sourced from some of our farmers if I can, To use in our products, and if I can't find it there, then I really

have to look hard to see that I can find products that do not have any additives in it, because in Germany, most of them are banned that we use here.

[00:13:03] So I try to stay away from them.

[00:13:04] **David Crabill:** So you were born and raised in Germany. When did you move over to the United States?

[00:13:12] **Jenn Bowersock:** It's actually funny, it's been exactly 21 years now that I moved to the United States, so I've been in Germany for half my life, and in half my life I've been here now.

[00:13:20] **David Crabill:** I know that Ohio has a lot of German heritage and influence. Do you think that that is part of the reason why your business took off so quickly?

[00:13:32] **Jenn Bowersock:** Not directly in our little area here, but our surrounding areas that have a larger German population, They have contributed quite a bit to the word of mouth now, which is wonderful, and, Yeah, I guess you could say that they all contributed really well to it as well.

[00:13:50] **David Crabill:** Now, the flip side of that is obviously people are used to having a certain type of baked goods. You know, a certain type of cheesecake could be much sweeter than a German cheesecake. have you found sometimes that that's a challenge because people are expecting one thing and then, your items are quite different.

[00:14:09] **Jenn Bowersock:** Not necessarily a challenge in regards to them being able to like it, but a challenge for them to understand that the ingredients are more costly, which in regards turns the products to be a little bit more expensive when they want to purchase it, as a whole cheesecake.

[00:14:26] It usually is going to cost you a lot more than what you're used to from the store because of the ingredients that are used. Taste wise, I have not had anything but good feedback from people. There's a lot of them that really enjoy it because it is not as sweet. So they come back because of those kinds of reasons too.

[00:14:41] And that's, that's just amazing

[00:14:44] **David Crabill:** Now you mentioned that you do a lye dip for your pretzels. Has there been any concern from people about that? Because I know lye can be pretty dangerous, right?

[00:14:58] **Jenn Bowersock:** It's more dangerous for the person that handles it versus the ones that eat it. Once it's actually heated up in the oven and baked, it is completely safe. So there's no danger to any of my customers for the lye. But the lye is what actually gives it that authentic German taste. Color and also the crust that is on the outside of that pretzel.

[00:15:20] There's no comparison to it when it comes to substituting it with that baking soda dip that a lot of people use now in their homes to create pretzels.

[00:15:28] **David Crabill:** Are there a lot of pretzel bakeries out there that use a lye dip, or is this very unique to your business?

[00:15:37] **Jenn Bowersock:** From what I have seen and looked around at, using the lye is very unique. I was really hesitant at first, because of some of the cautions that they tell you to take for it, and now it's like, okay, whatever. We just go through the motion, mask up and, you know, glove up when we mix our lye, but once it's mixed, it's relatively safe to use.

[00:15:59] **David Crabill:** Are there other things that you feel sets your business apart from others?

[00:16:05] **Jenn Bowersock:** I think my biggest thing Really is is that this truly is my heritage, that I grew up with this, that I have hands-on experience with it from childhood on until I left in my adulthood. And now I'm just bringing it here to Ohio. What I just love and miss from Germany in itself.

[00:16:25] So I think that's what's truly unique about it. I do not deviate from it either from the recipes. I don't try to, sometimes what we call it here is Americanized things or change it into some of the traditional things. Like if somebody asks me to add icing on top of my stuff and things like that, I'm like, Nope, that's not how it's made in Germany.

[00:16:43] That's not how I'm going to make it for you here. So those are just some of the things that. I'm really strict about myself as well as my business because it's a German bakery and that's what I want to stick to.

[00:16:54] **David Crabill:** As successful as your business has been, do you feel like not catering to requests has limited your business in some way?

[00:17:04] **Jenn Bowersock:** Not as of yet but I guarantee in the future there's probably going to be some sort of limitations there.

[00:17:11] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean, it goes both ways, right? Because in one way, you know, you're not necessarily meeting the needs of as many people, but at the same time, you're really sticking to yourself and your authentic product, and that's something that will attract a lot of people, too. Now, you said that this is part of your heritage.

[00:17:36] What are some memories that you have from growing up in Germany regarding these baked goods?

[00:17:42] **Jenn Bowersock:** Oh, man. Um, Sunday mornings, fresh baked pleutschen, which are crusty rolls, for breakfast. On the way to school, you just have to go a little bit around the other corner, but there's a bakery, there was a bakery at every corner when I was growing up, and you wake up and you walk out the door and you can already smell the bakeries.

[00:18:01] So that's something I always remember. I could go to my corner bakery and I could pick up a croissant in the morning for breakfast or, you know, something else that I'd like. Those are just some of the things that I really truly miss.

[00:18:13] **David Crabill:** So I think it was your dad's suggestion that you started this business, right? And how long was it from the point at which you started to consider the business to when it actually got off the ground?

[00:18:25] **Jenn Bowersock:** My dad literally suggested it in August of last year and by September of last year we started at the farmers market. So within two weeks. And then that first week at the farmer's market, I really saw the joy that people had from having something new at the farmer's market. We try to keep things affordable too. So those are just some of the things that Really made us stand out and helped us to grow in all that during the last, we were only there for like four weeks last year. So yeah,

[00:18:55] **David Crabill:** Wow, two weeks now. Had you already had a lot of experience making pretzels before this?

[00:19:03] **Jenn Bowersock:** no, not at all. My dad shared with me a website he found with a recipe from a German blogger. so we tried her recipe out and we were impressed with that recipe. So within those two weeks, we tried the recipe,

ordered some of the supplies we were going to need. I had a few friends over just to taste test and things like that.

[00:19:25] And then, Yeah, it was literally all within the first two weeks, and it just took off from there.

[00:19:30] **David Crabill:** That is very unusual. I mean, I'd say most people who consider starting a business, if they had never made a product before, they might spend weeks or months or even longer sometimes just practicing and perfecting their product. And then they would take a long time to set up the business and then eventually apply for a market before. Sometimes it takes years. So why do you feel like you rushed through the process so quickly and jumped right in and only two weeks' time?

[00:20:04] **Jenn Bowersock:** Because I'm ADHD, German, and head in I go head first in everything I do. The thought process usually happens afterwards. The same with this here. We just got a little bit luckier on this end when it comes to this part of the business.

[00:20:18] **David Crabill:** what was that first market like? I know it was successful, but. What was the feeling like that day?

[00:20:25] **Jenn Bowersock:** For probably two years prior to that, I watched people around me selling a lot of their products and I would just work really hard to try and sell my products at market and it just wasn't hitting the market correctly. So I always took 99 percent of my products back home.

[00:20:43] so that was always discouraging. First day of the market last year we set up by eight o'clock, we opened up at the farmer's market. And by 9:30, I was almost sold out already. A friend of mine came by to check and see how things were going. And I just, I broke down in tears because I was just so, it was so overwhelmingly exciting and I just couldn't believe my eyes how well things were going that day.

[00:21:08] So yeah, that was just an exciting start and it felt like hope again. There was a glimmer of hope that we may have finally found something that could be sustainable to do from home.

[00:21:18] **David Crabill:** So what I'm hearing is, Although you were an entrepreneur for a while and a seamstress and trying to sell these handmade creations at markets and events.

[00:21:27] You were frustrated, maybe? You were having a challenge finding a niche.

[00:21:34] **Jenn Bowersock:** yes. Finding that niche is really hard.

[00:21:36] **David Crabill:** And what prevented you from just giving up? And going out and getting a job somewhere.

[00:21:43] **Jenn Bowersock:** So we have a lot of health issues here at home. I deal with what's called psoriatic arthritis. So my health is up and down constantly. And my son, my youngest son, deals with epilepsy and seizures. So that's what originally actually not really forced me, but I wanted to stay home with him so I could let him homeschool and Keep an eye on him because this was all new to us.

[00:22:09] that's really what started me off working from home.

[00:22:11] **David Crabill:** Now, were you already a vendor at this farmer's market before you started the pretzels thing? Were you selling these other items and then just added pretzels onto them?

[00:22:23] **Jenn Bowersock:** So last year we did not do the market because it hadn't really been doing well. So we realized that we were investing more money than we needed to. So we put that on a halt, Then at the end of the year is when we switched over hoping that we would still get a spot at the market.

[00:22:41] And thankfully they were able to squeeze us in as a vendor.

[00:22:44] **David Crabill:** But I'd imagine you already had certain things, right? Like a tent and a booth set up Yeah. Those kinds of, so the basic equipment we had, we upgraded recently, but yeah. basic equipment we already had available.

[00:22:57] So can you take me forward? that the market season was at its tail end. You were only there for four weeks, but what were those four weeks like?

[00:23:08] **Jenn Bowersock:** They were very encouraging, and we knew that we needed to make sure that we were a seasonal vendor this year. So as soon as the seasonal spots opened up, we immediately grabbed a spot. And we're able to get locked in for the year, which is nice, because then we're in the same location all year long, and people always know where to find you.

[00:23:28] That was a difference from last year's when people had to kind of come looking for us cause they didn't know where exactly we were.

[00:23:35] **David Crabill:** How many pretzels were you making each week in those first few weeks?

[00:23:40] **Jenn Bowersock:** I think we started off with maybe making 60 pretzels or something like that at the most for a farmer's market day,

[00:23:49] **David Crabill:** And how does that compare with how much you sell now?

[00:23:54] **Jenn Bowersock:** It has gone up quite a bit. We probably make between 200 and 300 pretzels for the weekend now. Whether we sell out of them every time, not necessarily but that's kind of our prep between that, those numbers now. So it's gone up quite a bit.

[00:24:12] **David Crabill:** But you sell a lot more than pretzels now, right?

[00:24:16] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes, We've added Kreppel, which is German doughnuts. They're lighter and fluffier. We only sell those pre order on Tuesday. And then for the farmers market, we've tried to add things like Brötchen, which is German rolls, sweet rolls, Fall is upon us, so we're getting ready to start back up with our sweet pretzels, cheesecakes.

[00:24:39] So just try to rotate some of these products around each week.

[00:24:42] **David Crabill:** Now, you mentioned that you might not sell out of all of your pretzels, so what are you doing with the leftovers? Are you able to freeze them?

[00:24:51] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes, you can actually freeze them, which is nice, because when we sell them in bigger packages, that's what I let my customers know. They can take them home and freeze them so that nothing goes to waste. But we also make croutons out of them. When they don't sell we're getting ready to also start making, um, like a breadcrumb with it because We have too many croutons now, so we're going to switch over into breadcrumbs, which is kind of a nice little touch for like chicken nuggets or something like that at home, too. Give it a little bit of a different taste. Yeah, that's the main thing that we do with them.

[00:25:22] **David Crabill:** Have you had a product that just didn't work very well?

[00:25:26] **Jenn Bowersock:** No, not really. I think some of the specialty items like cheesecakes and things like that. They just take a little bit longer for the word to get out a little bit. And for people to taste them. So we're going to do more samples and things like that in order for those kinds of things to be able to be seen a little bit easier.

[00:25:45] **David Crabill:** Now, you said that you do pre order Tuesdays for the donuts, which are a very popular item. Are they pre ordering and then picking them up from a market, or how is that working?

[00:25:58] **Jenn Bowersock:** So they actually pre order and then they can pick up from the house. We actually have a refrigerated bakery display unit. Out on the front porch that we just enclosed. That's where the customers can pick everything up.

[00:26:12] **David Crabill:** did see a picture of that renovation project. It was quite a transformation. Can you describe that a little bit?

[00:26:20] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yeah, it was kind of fun. We were actually looking at sheds. Me and my dad were looking at sheds to see if we wanted to add a shed to the driveway so that we could set it up for pickup locations and things like that. We kind of looked at the front porch and we were like What could we do here?

[00:26:37] I was like well, if we can just get this fridge out here and can get it to where it's safe to leave all year long without ruining the actual device, the appliance, let's try something. So we had an old climbing unit that my dad built for the boys when they were younger, and we took that apart and we used a lot of those wood pieces from that and also from one of our old picnic benches we had built.

[00:27:00] And then we expanded the front porch a little bit so that we could get that bakery unit on there and then just My dad built a wall up around it and put some lattice board around it to make it look a little nicer. But yeah, that was, it was kind of fun to see them coming together.

[00:27:14] **David Crabill:** So people pay in advance when they order and then they just pick up the items from the porch, correct?

[00:27:22] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes, that's correct. Sometimes there's leftovers, so people do have the option to stop in and look to see if there's anything there for them to pick up and they can either pay cash or use one of the QR codes to pay for what they pick up.

[00:27:34] **David Crabill:** Has there ever been an issue with People not paying, or things disappearing from the display case.

[00:27:42] **Jenn Bowersock:** Thankfully, not yet.

[00:27:46] **David Crabill:** I saw a post of yours where you clarified to people that you were not a regular bakery and they could not just walk into your house. Has that actually been a problem?

[00:28:00] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes, sadly it has. I've had at least two people that have just walked in the house thinking that they needed to come in to either pay or to let us know what they were picking up or things like that which of course we're all still learning right now on how to make that work so, that's why I had to put that post up.

[00:28:16] **David Crabill:** Mean, you have the social media posts. Did you put a sign as well out there on the door to make sure that doesn't happen?

[00:28:25] **Jenn Bowersock:** I'm actually working on that sign. no, I have not. I've actually gotten to the point where I do not leave my front door open anymore. I just have a storm door up there and I used to just leave it open so I can crack the window and let the air blow through the house a little bit, but we just keep the front door completely shut now because people can't come in if I do that.

[00:28:44] **David Crabill:** So do you sell the doughnuts at the market as well?

[00:28:48] **Jenn Bowersock:** We've tried for one weekend so far. But it is a lot of work, and it requires me to get up extremely early and after a full day of baking in the kitchen the day before that tends to become a little difficult, so we right now are just doing it for Tuesdays.

[00:29:05] **David Crabill:** And how do you manage the pre orders? What are you using for that?

[00:29:11] **Jenn Bowersock:** I use a website called Hotplate and I'm able to list all of my current events, all of my current products that are available And that's how we actually do it all.

[00:29:22] **David Crabill:** I saw an old system where you were using JotForm. Did you find limitations to using JotForm?

[00:29:31] **Jenn Bowersock:** The biggest limitation to JotForm was that customers couldn't pay directly through that. But otherwise I really enjoy that form. I think I'm going to utilize that for my custom cake orders again too.

[00:29:45] **David Crabill:** So you sell from your porch Percentage wise, about how many of your orders would you say are pre orders and they pick up from your house versus what you do at a market?

[00:30:00] **Jenn Bowersock:** Right now I'd say probably only about 30 percent is from the house and the rest is really farmer's market and other events.

[00:30:07] **David Crabill:** So, you do the farmer's market on a consistent basis. What other events have you done?

[00:30:14] **Jenn Bowersock:** So we have been able to go to events out in Troy. We've been to Minster. We have been in Piqua to some of the fests they had there, like the Piqua Art Fest. We were able to showcase our products there. We've done a few events at the Piqua Center that's being renovated right now.

[00:30:34] Some of the other places we've been able to go to were some of the reptile shows. That was interesting because we were making little reptile creations for those reptile shows. That's always fun. Pumpkin Fest, I believe we're getting ready to try and go to the new Bremen PumpkinFest.

[00:30:49] So yeah, just lots of different little events and areas we try to go to so we can spread the word as far as possible.

[00:30:55] **David Crabill:** I'm also thinking, you know, obviously a German bakery in October. You got Oktoberfest, right? Is that a big thing for you?

[00:31:04] **Jenn Bowersock:** As of right now, actually, the Oktoberfest scared me a little bit. Because there's going to be so many people there, and I don't believe at this current point, unless we had a food truck, could we actually keep up with demand and supply for that. So we just, right now, have opted not to participate in the actual Oktoberfest activities.

[00:31:25] **David Crabill:** That is a good point. That happens to a lot of cottage food entrepreneurs when they consider going to a state fair. You definitely have to be very prepared and sometimes there's just too much foot traffic. To manage it from a home kitchen so, yeah, I mean that, it's not a bad problem to have though, so you can look forward to the day where you can participate in those events, and I'm sure you'll do very well.

[00:31:54] **Jenn Bowersock:** We are looking forward to it.

[00:31:57] **David Crabill:** We haven't talked about pricing yet. How do you price your items?

[00:32:03] **Jenn Bowersock:** So that's something I've always struggled with, but I have found several different tools that I'm able to utilize. One of them is called Cook Keep Book. I'm able to actually enter all of my recipes and ingredients, the cost of the ingredients and all of that into this web based program, and it then allows me to calculate what my profit margins are through that actual um, website and that gives me kind of an idea of what I need to price.

[00:32:35] I still use an excel sheet afterwards that someone else has designed and created that allows me to input my unit cost into it for each pretzel, for example, and then it allows me to enter labor, packaging cost like even our overhead, like the electric we have to pay and things like that, into all of that, and then I can figure out. What the minimum cost is that I need to charge when I go somewhere and sell.

[00:33:00] **David Crabill:** So you use Cook Keep Book to figure out your pricing, and what pricing have you landed on?

[00:33:08] **Jenn Bowersock:** So for my traditional pretzels, we are at 3 for my comfort level, that's at my highest end.

[00:33:16] **David Crabill:** Is that what you were selling them at a year ago?

[00:33:21] **Jenn Bowersock:** No, we were actually selling them at 1.50 a year ago when we started.

[00:33:26] **David Crabill:** Did you feel like that was a good price at the time, or were you not really making any money?

[00:33:33] **Jenn Bowersock:** I thought I was doing a good price at that point, but I think when you first start off, you really don't. Realize what all you need to

take into consideration when you calculate your pricing. All of the overhead that you really don't think about has to go into it as well, including having to pay employees if you have employees and things like that.

[00:33:54] So those are sometimes things that you really just don't think about when you start off.

[00:33:58] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I think that happens to a lot of entrepreneurs, until they actually put it all down on paper or into a program, it's hard to know exactly what your pricing needs to be at. Now, do you have any employees yet?

[00:34:13] **Jenn Bowersock:** Just my son. He is right now my full time employee.

[00:34:16] He'll be 19 next, in two months, and helping mom with the business.

[00:34:21] **David Crabill:** So how many kids do you have?

[00:34:24] **Jenn Bowersock:** I have three.

[00:34:26] So my oldest, she's not in the house anymore. She'll be 21 here soon. And then my youngest is 14, and then my middle one, he'll be 19.

[00:34:34] **David Crabill:** Yeah. And I know you mentioned that you went through a divorce, so you've been running this business as a single mom.

[00:34:44] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes,

[00:34:46] **David Crabill:** Has that presented any challenges?

[00:34:49] **Jenn Bowersock:** Being a single parent is a challenge in itself and running a business on top of it. Yes, there's always challenges. There's some days where I wish I could just focus on the business and not have to worry about taking care of the kids as well. But that's just part of life. And we do what we can to take care of the household.

[00:35:05] **David Crabill:** Do you find that your 14 year old helps at all with the business?

[00:35:11] **Jenn Bowersock:** no, he does not like to do it. Yeah, he has no interest in it at all.

[00:35:18] **David Crabill:** Yeah, when they're younger they're inherently interested and then at some point, they want to do their own thing, right?

[00:35:27] **Jenn Bowersock:** That's right. Yep.

[00:35:29] **David Crabill:** So you have sold a lot at markets and events. You also do the porch pickups. Have you done custom orders as well?

[00:35:37] **Jenn Bowersock:** Yes, we've done a few custom orders now, which is kind of exciting. We've done cheesecakes, we've done custom orders just for pretzels and things like that. I almost forgot about this, but last year we actually were asked to do snacks for a wedding, so we were able to do

[00:35:56] 300 pretzels for a wedding party. So that was kind of fun to do.

[00:36:01] **David Crabill:** I saw somewhere that you can, like, customize your pretzels or bake them on site. What is that that you offer to people?

[00:36:12] **Jenn Bowersock:** There's two different ways that can be done. Like for the wedding, for example, we prepped all of our pretzels at home. We froze the raw dough and we took it to the site that we were at and we used the ovens that they had there at the wedding venue and Did all of our dipping, baking, and topping there.

[00:36:31] So that was as fresh as you can get the pretzels. Now you can also do the pre baking here and then we would just take it with us. And either you can then bake them up at your location or we would still do the baking up. By refreshing them on site and then typically at that point I like doing custom pretzels so people can just then let me know what they want on their pretzels like a pizza.

[00:36:55] You know when you say I want some pepperoni pizza or something like that they can do the same thing with the pretzels there.

[00:36:59] **David Crabill:** have you done this at an event yet?

[00:37:02] **Jenn Bowersock:** For the custom pretzels, yes and we typically offer our standard bacon and cheese or our jalapeno cheese combinations to keep it as simple as possible for the events.

[00:37:14] **David Crabill:** Now I've got to ask about your business name, where does that come from?

[00:37:21] **Jenn Bowersock:** So Backstube actually means bakery in German and, um, funny or not, but my dad actually came up with it.

[00:37:28] **David Crabill:** So as you think back on the past year, what has the overall trajectory of your business been like?

[00:37:38] **Jenn Bowersock:** It's been on an uptick, which is really nice. I have really noticed people coming from all over to find us and come meet us at the farmer's markets. I've met. People that have brought friends that are visiting from Germany over to us to meet us and also to um, really double check whether we really are making German baked goods.

[00:38:01] But I really see that this is going to go to a place where either I'm still toying with the thought of whether I want to find a brick and mortar location or if I want to find myself a food truck that I can then turn into a mobile bakery.

[00:38:19] **David Crabill:** What are the pros and cons of each of those options?

[00:38:24] **Jenn Bowersock:** the pros for actual physical location would be people know exactly where I'm at. They can come in, at specific times and hours. However, for a brick and mortar, there's a lot of overhead that comes along with that. And I think there's. somewhat more restrictions with the people that you can reach at that point as well people would have to travel to come to you all the time, which potentially, as long as you're good enough, will probably be good.

[00:38:53] But My thought process is with a food truck, we could go to different places and areas that we could not reach at this current point, even festivals and things like that, that we would love to be part of at this current moment. And we just can't because we just can't keep up with demand. So those are just some of the things that I see. For the pluses and negatives at this point,

[00:39:12] **David Crabill:** What's currently holding you back from pursuing one of those options?

[00:39:19] **Jenn Bowersock:** finances, having the money to do those things especially when you weren't planning on a business like this. So you did not have those few years of saving up and actually, really having a full on business plan and all those kinds of things in place already in order to go get a business loan or something like that.

[00:39:37] So it's going to take a little bit of time to get our footing in that sense. And to really figure out. Where we really want to go so that we can have a concrete plan to move forward with it.

[00:39:49] **David Crabill:** If you did have the financial ability to get a food truck, for instance, do you feel like you have enough of a customer base to support that investment.

[00:40:02] **Jenn Bowersock:** Honestly, I think there's a lot of different locations that have asked us to come that we've had to turn down just because of the factor that there's no way I could pre make, that many pretzels in advance and still make them taste and look good without being able to make them on site.

[00:40:19] So I really do feel that. That is something that we could sustain once we are able to get into it.

[00:40:26] **David Crabill:** Now, with you only being able to use one residential oven or double oven in Ohio at this point, do you feel like if that restriction were in place that you would be investing in more like a commercial oven to put into your kitchen?

[00:40:42] **Jenn Bowersock:** Oh, definitely. Yeah, because you can, Make so much more all at the same time to where it cuts down on your time. And that's really essential when you want to grow. You need to learn to figure out how to cut the cost in your labor cost and in your time, being able to be more productive at the same time.

[00:41:03] So that's kind of one of the things that a larger oven would do.

[00:41:06] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like you could take on some of these larger events from your home if you had that bigger oven?

[00:41:15] **Jenn Bowersock:** No, because pretzels, They're not very tasty the way they should be when they're sitting out for too long. So the fresher you can showcase that and so I would not feel comfortable doing events like that without being able to bake things on site.

[00:41:31] **David Crabill:** Well, I know this business has grown a lot faster than you ever expected as you look forward. Do you have a sense right now of when you might be ready to take that next step?

[00:41:44] **Jenn Bowersock:** Right now I think we're hoping that maybe by the end of next year we'll have either our hands on a food truck or at least more concrete plans. On how to be able to finance a food truck and the equipment that needs to go with it and come up with a much better plan at that point. So we're trying to give ourselves a little bit of time.

[00:42:04] **David Crabill:** Do you think there's anything about yourself, personally, that made you particularly well suited to being successful at a business like this?

[00:42:16] **Jenn Bowersock:** Um, I'm not a person that likes to give up very easily. So when I have my mind set on something, I try really hard to pursue that goal and to reach that goal. so Yeah, that's, I think, one of the strong suits that I have. Um, and I actually enjoy this. I really enjoy baking and everything else, so it's not something where I see I'm going to get burned out too fast on it.

[00:42:41] So I'm able to create different things that help with all of that as well.

[00:42:47] **David Crabill:** As you think back on the past year? Are there any moments or particular moments that really stand out to you?

[00:42:54] **Jenn Bowersock:** So I had, last year I, I remember one customer that came to me with her daughter and she's from Japan. In Japan you really don't eat a lot of sweet products or anything like that. But she has been my customer ever since that day and we introduced her to, we call them Ayavec.

[00:43:17] They are egg based yeast dough and we usually add raisins or chocolate chips to them. So they're You know, a nice little soft, almost like a brioche kind of a roll. And she said well, we really don't like anything sweet. And we had a few sample pieces. So we just let her try some of the samples that we had.

[00:43:37] And we have had her hooked ever since. And yeah, so those are just some of the moments that I really cherish because. When your customers keep coming back supporting you and also telling others about you those are some really proud moments and keep you going.

[00:43:52] **David Crabill:** You talked about your youth and going by the corner bakery every day on the way to school. Is that a long term future goal for you to eventually become a corner bakery store?

[00:44:08] **Jenn Bowersock:** I'm honestly not 100 percent sure yet. This is such hard work and I really just want this business to be in a place where, We, as a family, are doing okay and can sustain a normal lifestyle together. If that's what happens down the road, that would be wonderful, but it's not my current goal.

[00:44:31] **David Crabill:** While obviously every business is challenging and rewarding, why do you love running your business so much?

[00:44:40] **Jenn Bowersock:** Because giving makes you happy. It's always been something that I found true all my life. Helping people, feeding people so these are just some things that all come together at once in my bakery. And It just brings me a lot of joy.

[00:45:00] **David Crabill:** Well, awesome. Thank you so much for sharing your journey with us. Now, if people would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:45:12] **Jenn Bowersock:** So they can find me on Facebook, Instagram. They can even find me on Nextdoor and Google. They can look up jennsbackstube.com . They'll be able to find all of my links and information there as well, including any kind of events or festivals I'm going to.

[00:45:30] **David Crabill:** Well, great. Well, I will include links to all those in the show notes, and thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:45:38] **Jenn Bowersock:** Thanks for inviting me. I really enjoyed it.

[00:45:44] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

[00:45:48] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/123.

[00:45:54] 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 it as well.

[00:46:07] And finally, if you're thinking about starting your own homemade food business, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the

steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

[00:46:21] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.