

Matt Rosen with Sergeant Shortbread

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 Matt Rosen.

[00:00:10] But first, we need to talk about email, and especially email marketing. If you're not sending emails to your customers on a consistent basis, then I think you are missing a big opportunity for sales.

[00:00:22] I really love using Kit to manage email for my fudge business and they recently introduced the best free tier that I've ever seen in an email marketing platform, which allows you to send emails to up to 10, 000 subscribers for free. So if you still haven't hopped on the email marketing bandwagon, now is a great time to do so.

[00:00:42] To get started and learn more, you can watch my free email marketing tutorial at forrager.com/email.

[00:00:49] All right, so I have Matt on the show today. He lives in Eden Prairie, Minnesota and sells gourmet shortbread cookies with his cottage food business, Sergeant shortbread.

[00:01:00] Matt has a fascinating story that started completely randomly while he was on vacation and it inspired him to start making shortbread cookies despite hav zero prior baking experience.

[00:01:14] Before long, he started receiving requests for his cookies from friends and co-workers and his business was born. Over the past six and a half years, his business has taken a number of turns, including finding commercial kitchens to take on larger events and wholesale orders. Doing a full rebrand and business name change midway through, and finding a focus in business to business orders.

[00:01:37] I have not heard a cottage food story quite like Matt's, and I know you're going to love it. And with that Let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Matt. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:49] **Matt Rosen:** Well, thanks, David. Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

[00:01:52] **David Crabill:** Well, Matt, I know you've listened to the podcast quite a bit. You know how I typically start an episode. Can you take me back and share how your journey got started?

[00:02:01] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, I'd love to. It's a very unique journey, if you will. Um, I have to take you back. I was in the military for 23 years and retired in 2015. And once I retired, I just

[00:02:15] did a couple of jobs here and there, just trying to figure out what I wanted to do. And ended up going on vacation with my wife and my parents. And the day before we were supposed to fly back home from Hawaii, we wandered into this store called the Honolulu Cookie Company. And if you are not familiar with the Honolulu Cookie Company, they specialize in shortbread cookies.

[00:02:36] And I tasted these free samples of shortbread cookies and completely fell in love with these cookies. I told my wife, I said, these are so amazing, I said, but I really don't want to pay shipping and handling to get these from Honolulu to Minneapolis. So I'm just going to make my own.

[00:02:49] And truth be told, I actually never even looked into the shipping cost. It might be free shipping. I don't even know. I just assumed that there would be a shipping cost to it. So I told her, I said, I'm just going to make my own. So there I was standing in their store, Googling a recipe for shortbread cookies, because I literally had never baked a day in my life until we came home from this vacation.

[00:03:09] And uh, I didn't even know how to use a mixer. I had to self teach myself how to turn that mixer on and uh, googled a recipe for shortbread cookies and looked at the ingredients. I knew what all the ingredients were and being in the military for 23 years I knew that I'd be able to follow orders, aka read a recipe and follow directions.

[00:03:26] So, I wasn't too worried about that and came home and just kind of started baking just for us, just for family. This was never supposed to be a business and, uh, it ignited a passion for baking and the first batch of cookies that I made. my wife said, okay, look, I know you love baking now, but you need to take this to work because I'm not going to keep eating all these cookies

and all these other things that you're baking now that you found this newfound passion for baking.

[00:03:49] So I started taking it into work and people at work started asking me, Hey, I've got a family reunion coming up. Can I get four dozen of these cookies? Or I've got a birthday party coming up. Can I order two dozen of these? And, and at the time I had no clue what the cottage food law was. And so. I told him I said, well no, I can't do that.

[00:04:05] I can give them to you, but I can't sell them because I'm making these in my home kitchen. And then I happened to have a coworker. She's like, well, have you looked into the Minnesota cottage food law? And I was like, I don't even know what you're talking about. She's like, you should check that out.

[00:04:16] And so I Googled it then lo and behold, I can, Bake and sell cookies right out of my home kitchen. So that was, uh, April of 2018 is when I first registered with the state of Minnesota as a cottage food business.

[00:04:29] **David Crabill:** Wow. Fascinating. So you just completely randomly stumbled into this shop in Hawaii.

[00:04:38] **Matt Rosen:** Yep. And a matter of fact, I wasn't even the one in the shop. Truth be told, I was across the street at the local watering hole having a burger and a beer and it was a Sunday afternoon, so I was watching football. But my wife and my mother wandered into this store and my wife texted me and she's like, they have free samples of cookies over here.

[00:04:58] You got to come try these. So I paid my tab and walked across the street and completely fell in love with shortbread cookies after tasting samples.

[00:05:06] **David Crabill:** It's so interesting, isn't it? How your life can turn in different ways. Like if you hadn't gone on this trip to Hawaii, or if they weren't giving free samples that day, like you could easily just not have an interest in baking or a business right now. Right

[00:05:23] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah. this would have never happened. I would have never, had I not gone on this vacation or not gone into the store, I would not have walked into the kitchen and said, you know, I think I'm going to start baking today. So, you know, cause I didn't grow up baking. You know, my mom baked and I had relatives that baked, but I was never in the kitchen helping them.

[00:05:42] I was doing the sampling and the taste testing after it was all done. So, yeah, this would have never happened had we not randomly walked into this cookie store in Hawaii the day before we were supposed to fly home.

[00:05:52] **David Crabill:** Now, I'm just curious. Cause imagine at this point in your life, you had had a lot of baked goods. Like why were these shortbread cookies making such a big impression on you?

[00:06:02] **Matt Rosen:** It's just a shortbread cookie that tends to be a little less sweet than a drop cookie, like a monster cookie or a sugar cookie or chocolate chip. So, I think that was the biggest appeal to me. It still hits that sweet tooth that I have, but it's not overly sugary like some drop cookies. Not all of them, but some drop cookies can be.

[00:06:23] So, I think that the biggest appeal for me was, uh, it was just a little less on the sweetness scale.

[00:06:28] **David Crabill:** Okay, so you randomly stumbled upon this store and these cookies, fell in love with them, went back home, started making them. When did you actually start to think about turning this into a business?

[00:06:41] **Matt Rosen:** So I baked my very first cookie in December of 2017. And by April of 2018 uh, that's when I registered with the state, but it really, I mean, it still wasn't supposed to be a business per se. I just kind of registered with them just so I could legally sell to co-workers. And then the summer of 2018, I did my first farmer's market, because all my coworkers and friends and family, everybody's telling me how great these are and, oh, you should sell these.

[00:07:09] But in my mind, I'm like, well, you're friends and family and co-workers. You're supposed to say that. You're not gonna, you're probably not gonna tell me, oh Matt, these are really bad. Please don't ever make these and bring these free cookies in again. So, I said, I need to try it out in what, quote unquote, the real world.

[00:07:27] So I did a farmer's market and just signed up for about four or five markets over that summer and started to get repeat customers. And, you know, that's when it kind of started to set in, okay, well, maybe I'm on to something, but, in order to make this into an actual business, I have to grow a lot bigger than, than just selling at three or four farmers markets over a summer and selling to my co workers.

[00:07:49] So, just gradually built up business. I had a website, so I started offering free delivery and In the southwest Twin Cities metro area here in Eden Prairie and some of the surrounding cities. I think as long as you were within 10 miles of where I live I would deliver cookies for free, no minimum order.

[00:08:05] So if somebody ordered a dozen shortbread cookies, I would drive 10 miles to deliver them to their door. And gradually grew from there and then finally in May of 2020, it smack dab in the middle of a pandemic. I told my wife, I said uh, I'm going to quit my job because at the time before the pandemic, when we were still going into the office and everything, I was, I was making deliveries during my lunch hour.

[00:08:27] I would make deliveries on my way home from work because I didn't get them all done over the lunch hour. And then I would bake that night to deliver them the next day during lunch hour. then I was doing either farmers markets in the summertime or winter craft shows, festivals, winter markets, things like that.

[00:08:44] it just grew that I, I, it was just too much. So, July 20th of 2020. That is when I officially stepped away from my corporate job and became the CEO and janitor of Sergeant Shortbread cookie company all in the same day,

[00:08:58] **David Crabill:** Now, you said, you know, you were, you're trying to figure out how to turn this into a business, but of course, as you said, you already had a job and you're retired from the military, right? So, why did you feel compelled to turn this into a business?

[00:09:11] **Matt Rosen:** because it just brought so much joy. to my life, just being able to bake these cookies and It's still fun. It's always been fun since I first taught myself how to bake. I get so much joy and pleasure out of it. Delivering a dozen cookies.

[00:09:27] And when I show up at their door, they're like, aren't you the one who baked these too? I'm like, yep, that's me. And just to see the happiness on their faces and repeat customers coming back at different farmers markets and events and telling me, oh my gosh, blueberry lemon is my favorite or, oh, that spicy peanut butter that you make.

[00:09:44] I never thought I would like that, but wow, that spice is just right. And that's what kind of compelled me to, I need to do this for the rest of my life. My, the rest of my working life, that is.

[00:09:56] **David Crabill:** Now, was this the first business that you'd ever started?

[00:10:00] **Matt Rosen:** It's not. My wife and I went into business with my parents. This is ironic, uh, we started a fitness center in, uh, back in my hometown where I grew up. It's this population, 1,300 people, so it's really small, so anybody who wanted to work out needed to drive at least 20 miles.

[00:10:19] In any direction just to be able to go to a gym and to work out. So, a big thing at the time was, uh, a fitness gym called Curves for Women. Which used hydraulic equipment like stations. And so, created something like that, but it was for men and women.

[00:10:35] It wasn't just solely for women. So, they're my first business. I started that in 2000. And we kept it going until 2015, until we sold it. Found a handful of buyers, actual members that didn't want to see it go. So they purchased it from us in 2015.

[00:10:52] **David Crabill:** And I'm just curious about your military experience, like what were you doing in the military?

[00:10:59] **Matt Rosen:** Great question. You'd think that I was in food service. That's what the natural assumption would be, but far from it. I was in communications. I had multiple jobs, one of them was communications. I was infantry. Was in electronic warfare. And I was also a recruiter. So I covered those four job specialties in my 23-year career.

[00:11:23] **David Crabill:** I'm just thinking like with you being a recruiter and you having already run a business before, and I can just tell from talking to you, like you're a pretty dynamic person, you seem like a pretty social person. It seemed like you're pretty well set up. To start a business gain a following. Would you agree with that?

[00:11:41] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, for sure. Being a recruiter, you're essentially an entrepreneur. I mean, you have to quote unquote, run your own business. You have to go and find your own recruits. You have to interview them and you're doing most of that on your own. That required me to be very social and outgoing and, you can't just sit back and hope that customers or recruits in that case, come to you, you have to be very outgoing and charismatic too.

[00:12:07] you have to be likable. Otherwise the recruits are going to be like, Oh this guy's kind of a stick in the mud. I'm going to maybe see if I could find

another recruiter. So, so yes, that part of my, my military background, along with just the overall being in the military and. You know, Essentially, you get a mission, you do it.

[00:12:25] You don't say, well, I'd really like to do that, but I don't have time today. Well, that's just not an option. So I carried that into my business as well. When somebody orders 56 dozen cookies and they want it in, and that's 10 different flavors and they want specific packaging.

[00:12:41] You know, I don't say no. It's like you just do it. I'll take care of it. I'll make it happen if I have to bake and package for 48 hours straight then that's what I'll do to get you your 56 dozen cookies exactly how you want them.

[00:12:52] **David Crabill:** Do you think that you yourself, your personality and your experience with people is what really allowed your business off? Or do you think that it's the cookies themselves or your product?

[00:13:04] **Matt Rosen:** Oh, I'd like to think that it's me but I think it's the cookies. It's a combination of both. You know, I I Like I said, I'm an outgoing person. I'm a friendly person. I love to talk to people. I love meeting new people. But I also think that my product also speaks for itself. So yeah, I think it's kind of a combination of me and my personality and producing a good delicious product, I think is, doesn't hurt either.

[00:13:30] **David Crabill:** So can you walk me through the beginning of your business? I mean, you said that you picked up some events. You also were getting requests. For custom orders. Do you feel like your business just took off from the beginning or was it a very slow growth process?

[00:13:47] **Matt Rosen:** It was a slow growth, but that was intentional. I had a full time job at the time, and when I first started, like I said, I really didn't intend for this to be my sole business and so, it was slow. Uh, as I mentioned, the first summer, I think I did four or five farmers markets.

[00:14:02] Then the following summer I added two farmer's markets. I signed up seasonally for both of them. Then the following summer I would sign up for three and so, I just kind of kept adding, uh, slowly adding different events and different markets to my calendar and, I joined the, uh, local chamber of commerce and that really accelerated my business.

[00:14:22] in a way that I really wasn't expecting to be honest. A lot of business owners started ordering customer appreciation gifts or client appreciation gifts

or employee appreciation gifts, and they wanted custom labeling. They wanted to put their stickers on my cookies. And so That was an avenue of my business that I didn't see coming.

[00:14:41] That took me by surprise until I got my first order. And, to this day, that's predominantly what my business is. I still do local deliveries and individual orders, but a lot of my business now is doing custom labeling for companies for customer appreciation or employee appreciation gifts.

[00:15:00] **David Crabill:** So I noticed, you know, you're in the chamber of commerce and you received an award in 2022 for small business of the year. Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:15:14] **Matt Rosen:** Yes, yes I did. So small business of the year. it's based on, of course, business size. There's small and large businesses of the year. And yeah, super proud of that. I was nominated and voted on. And I was nominated by all the members of the Chamber of Commerce to a vote.

[00:15:31] And yes, I was nominated and presented with the Small Business of the Year for the Eden Prairie Chamber in 2022. So, Thrilled to get it. especially, you know, it's being voted on, like I said, by other members of the chamber. So it's a huge honor. And yes, I'm, I'm extremely proud of that.

[00:15:50] **David Crabill:** What led you to join the Chamber of Commerce in the first place?

[00:15:53] **Matt Rosen:** I was a business owner and so I just thought that's the thing to do. So, I knew a couple of people in the Chamber of Commerce. And so, they invited me to attend an event as a guest. I attended as a guest and, just seeing the networking that went on, that really excited me.

[00:16:12] so I thought, why not? You know, I'm a business owner and so, I think that's just what business owners are supposed to do. They're supposed to join the Chamber of Commerce, so that was probably my initial thought.

[00:16:23] **David Crabill:** Well, it's interesting because I've had a few guests on the podcast who Talked about the chamber of commerce, but not too many, but all of those who did have talked about how fantastic it was. So it's definitely something that somebody should look into if they're running a food business, especially like you said, it sounds like a great way to get into these B2B or business to business sales

[00:16:44] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, oh, I would recommend everybody look into their local chamber of commerce. just through networking, and meeting these other business owners. And not all of them are business owners. Some of them are in sales. And so they're going to visit with a client. I just had somebody last week.

[00:17:00] he called me. He's like, Matt, I know this is short notice, but I've got a client meeting tomorrow. Any way you could bake me four dozen, Anyway you could do that and, and that wouldn't, that wouldn't have happened had I not been in the Chamber of Commerce.

[00:17:12] my biggest orders have come from the Chamber of Commerce. And so, the nice thing about that is When one business orders a client appreciation gift and they give it to all their clients, for example I had a law firm order a bunch of cookies for client appreciation, well, those clients, one of their clients happens to own two other businesses.

[00:17:33] One is a financial advising firm and a brewery. They own two different businesses. Well, she ordered cookies for both of those businesses because she loved the cookies so much. And so, That's why networking with a, uh, a Chamber of Commerce is so, so important. And when you join the Chamber of Commerce, you can't just join and that's it, and just be a name in the directory.

[00:17:54] You've got to attend events as much as you can. I'm not saying go to every single one. Like here in Eden Prairie, I think they do two or three events per week. And so it's just not reasonable to think that I can attend all of them. But you know, if you've got to hit, one or two a month and just show your face, shake hands with people, and just keep reminding them, hey, don't forget, shortbread cookies and oats.

[00:18:15] Don't forget, I can put your sticker on my cookies, so when you're giving them to somebody. So anybody who talks to me or asks me about it, I recommend that your first stop is to join your local chamber of commerce.

[00:18:27] **David Crabill:** where you could have just as easily not joined the chamber. And it sounds like a lot of your business, perhaps the majority has come from those connections. So where do you think your business would be today? If you never took that step, I wouldn't be where I'm at right now, for sure. I am still a cottage food producer here in Minnesota, I have grown enough to, I have a commercial kitchen that I can bake the larger orders and I can now

ship but that has to be done, of course, through the commercial kitchen here in Minnesota.

[00:18:55] **Matt Rosen:** We're not allowed to ship through our cottage food. So, I wouldn't be where I'm at today. I can assure you of that. Where would I be? I would say probably I'd be doing a third of my business probably. I'd be doing a lot more. Farmers markets and craft shows and vendor fairs and things like that in order to try to make up the difference in Revenue that I get by being a member of the chamber.

[00:19:18] **David Crabill:** Do you think you would have left your job?

[00:19:21] **Matt Rosen:** Not as early as I did. I think it would have taken me probably another year or two just because I would have to do more vendor events. And I may not have left it. I might've gotten so burnt out and said, I just can't get to that next level. Just can't, I can't cross that threshold to where I know I can make this into a business.

[00:19:39] So truth be told, I may not have even been able to leave my job. Had it not been for uh, these B2B sales that, essentially I kind of stumbled upon.

[00:19:48] **David Crabill:** Now, going back to the beginning of your business, I noticed that you didn't have the same business name. You're now called Sergeant Shortbread Cookies, but Initially it was called Baker's Dozen. So can you just share a little bit about why you decided to change the name?

[00:20:05] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, for sure. So when I initially started. The first thing I baked was shortbread cookies but then as I mentioned it just kind of sparked a passion and so when I first started baking, I was doing everything from mini bundt cakes. To homemade granola bars, to homemade pop tarts, and of course the shortbread cookies.

[00:20:24] and so I didn't want to, I mean the shortbread cookies were the biggest thing that I was doing. And the granola bars, those were really the only two products that I brought to vendor fairs and farmers markets and things. And so, I didn't want to have shortbread in the name or cookie in the name because I had.

[00:20:40] More than just cookies. So, I called it the Baker's Dozen. I put 13 cookies in the bag instead of just a dozen, you always got an extra one. And so, that was kind of my niche, I guess. I don't know if that's the right word but, I called it, the Baker's Dozen.

[00:20:53] And then when I had so many people coming to these different events that I was at they're like, oh, you're a veteran owned business? Oh, we will take four packs of these. We just want to support a veteran owned business. And I would have some people come and they're like, we just came here.

[00:21:06] We saw you're a veteran owned business and you have cookies, so we came to the market today just to find you. initially, I didn't want to use my military background. I felt like I was quite unquote using it to my advantage but then it just, after hearing people talk to me about it, came to the reality that okay, I'm not really using it for benefit, it's just I should be proud of what I did.

[00:21:27] I spent 23 years there. serving our country. So, I should be proud of that. So then when I left my full time job and decided to do the baking business as my sole business, that's when I decided I'm just going to focus on shortbread cookies and I'm going to incorporate military into the name.

[00:21:42] And so, that's when I was renamed as Sergeant Shortbread.

[00:21:45] **David Crabill:** Yeah, it's so interesting. And I feel like. entrepreneurs often get really caught up on a name and they can spend a long time trying to figure out their name. But I like to tell people, I'm like, well, over time you can just change the name if it's not working, you know, it's not really too hard. Did you find there to be any challenge with changing your name and changing your brand?

[00:22:05] **Matt Rosen:** Not really. I mean, for me, it was, I think I wrote it down, I still had the piece of paper somewhere in a file. The initial like 20 names that I came up with. And so that was the first thing I did. And then, the next step was to of course go into social media. I wanted to make sure that Instagram was available.

[00:22:22] Facebook was available. The URL was available for a website. That made it easy. I was crossing off names because, Oh, well that Instagram isn't available or, Oh, that Facebook's not available. It wasn't too difficult of a process. I did work with a graphic designer and she did the camouflage pattern and the color palette that goes with the camouflage pattern and.

[00:22:42] She designed the logo for me. I know my limits and graphic design and coming up with things, uh, drawing logos and things like that. I know that's not my specialty. So, I reached out and had somebody help me with that. So, the whole process, going from the baker's dozen to Sergeant Shortbread probably

took A total of two or three months but once I had the name and all everything done and finalized, it was simple: you just put a new sticker on your packaging.

[00:23:09] So, that was a fairly easy transition.

[00:23:11] **David Crabill:** Well, obviously you weren't just changing the name, but you're really changing the brand entirely. And you're going from Baker's Dozen, which is very generic, to Sergeant Shortbread Cookies, which is obviously tailored to your military background and also very tailored to what you're selling and hyper niched.

[00:23:28] Do you feel like rebranding has actually changed how recognized you are, how much you sell, as you know, made the switch? Did you notice a difference?

[00:23:38] **Matt Rosen:** I did, I still to this day will have people come up and just tell me how much they love the name, how much they love the camouflage pattern. still after four and a half years I have people.

[00:23:49] Complimenting me on the name, how catchy it is. Oh, Sergeant Shortbread, wow, that, you know, that's perfect. And so, uh, so I do feel that it was a good switch. Uh, Cause yes, the Baker's does and I thought it would be all fun to have a Z on there and that would make it catchy. And, the gal that helped me with the graphic design, she's like, She's like, sorry, Matt, that's not very, that's not great, it's not brandable if you will.

[00:24:13] I don't know if that's a real word or not, but it would be a lot harder to brand that because it's just, like you said, it's generic. doesn't really tell anybody what I do. So, it definitely has uh, improved my business.

[00:24:25] **David Crabill:** So with this rebrand, you're obviously leaning in to your veteran experience. What are the different ways that you showcase that or use that in your new branding?

[00:24:35] **Matt Rosen:** My logo for sure. The logo is now, it looks like a military medal. But the medal itself is a cookie with a bite taken out of it. And so it incorporates both my military background with what I do now, the cookie. And I have a camouflage pattern that, that, uh. the graphic designer, she specifically created this color palette for me to use with the uh, camouflage pattern.

[00:25:00] So I have a custom tent that when I go to events, the whole top part of my tent is a camouflage pattern. And then it's got the name around the front facing part of it, and then uh, I just use a regular tablecloth, but I have a runner that has the logo with the camouflage pattern for indoor events.

[00:25:16] So, those are the biggest ways uh, that I've incorporated the military in with the cookies. I don't name my cookies any kind of military jargon or names or anything, so it's mainly, yeah, that's how I've incorporated it. Just with the name and the logo and, and the tagline which is reporting for cookie duty.

[00:25:33] **David Crabill:** Yeah, with the product names, I mean, it seems like it could be a good opportunity. Is it something that you've tried or thought about?

[00:25:41] **Matt Rosen:** I have, I have thought about it, you know, incorporating maybe not each specific individual cookie name, but maybe doing like a variety pack and calling it a, uh, in the military we have something called an MRE, which is a meal ready to eat. so I've thought about using instead of just a variety pack, I would call it a CRE and a CRE pack, which would be cookies ready to eat.

[00:26:03] so not really specific, like the blueberry lemon. I haven't tried to incorporate the uh, private blueberry lemon shortbread cookies, anything like that, but doing some sort of like a catchy name for say like a variety pack or some specialized packaging.

[00:26:19] **David Crabill:** You know what I've also seen some people in your position do is they won't use their branding for all their names, but like for their very best sellers, their like top one, two or three products. They will. Put a special name on those, Now, in terms of what you sell, I mean, we know you sell shortbread cookies. you describe your cookies a little bit? And sort of what your specialty is within the shortbread cookie realm.

[00:26:45] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah. So the shortbread cookies that I make, they're not going to be like the traditional Scottish shortbread. Mine are more like an English shortbread. So the Scottish shortbread. The traditional, what people think of as shortbread cookies, are not brittle, but they've got a snap to them, they're a little more on the dry side, where mine are almost a cross between a shortbread cookie and a drop cookie.

[00:27:09] So my number one seller is blueberry lemon. And so I use dried blueberries, but in the recipe I actually put lemon zest. I'll zest the lemon, but

then when I'm done zesting, instead of putting, say, a vanilla extract in there, I squeeze some of the lemon juice itself from the lemon into the dough so that I use that for liquid.

[00:27:27] So it's a little more on the softer side. Yeah, my shortbread cookies are more moist than a traditional Scottish shortbread cookie. I pride myself on being a little more unique on going with flavors that you. Typically wouldn't find in a shortbread cookie on a store shelf or at a bakery.

[00:27:43] So, uh, blueberry lemon, like I mentioned uh, the very first one I ever made and I still make today is the dark chocolate sea salt. Some of the more unique ones that I've made uh, spicy peanut butter, I mentioned that earlier. That's a peanut butter flavored shortbread cookie, but I put cayenne pepper, just a dash of cayenne pepper in there.

[00:28:01] So, after about the second or third bite, you just kind of get the, you feel a little bit of a tingle in the back of your throat from the spice of the cayenne pepper. And being in Minnesota, one of the biggest events in Minnesota is our state fair, the end of August, and it seems like, wasn't last year, but the year before, The big push with the different foods that were going to be at the state fair that year was dill pickle.

[00:28:22] I'm like, well, I have to lean into that. So I actually created a recipe and, and made dill pickle potato chip shortbread cookies where I put dill with dill pickle juice and then I actually crushed up dill pickle flavored potato chips and put that in the shortbread cookie too. So, that was good for about a month and a half.

[00:28:40] And then once the state fair was over, that flavor faded, so I don't make that one anymore.

[00:28:46] **David Crabill:** Did you actually sell at the state fair?

[00:28:49] **Matt Rosen:** no, I applied one time just to see if I could get in, but even if I would have got in, I don't, I don't know that I would. Our state fair brings in, in 10 days, it brings in probably a million and a half people over 10 days. It's, so, I don't know that I'm. I'm ready for, for that, for that magnitude of shortbread cookie baking and prepping.

[00:29:13] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, I know the Minnesota one is enormous, so probably no cottage food producer. I know you have a commercial

kitchen now, but probably no cottage food producer has tackled that state fair. But maybe someday.

[00:29:27] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, I joke because one of the most popular, well, the most popular food is a chocolate chip cookie called Sweet Martha's Cookies. And when people ask me if I've ever considered it. I always tell them, I'm like, yeah, I've applied every year, but I know Sweet Martha is sitting on that fare board, and every time she sees a cookie vendor come across the applications, nope, denied.

[00:29:48] So it's completely not true at all. But yeah, as a cottage food producer, it's. that would definitely be out of the realm of possibility for your uh, everyday cottage food producer like myself.

[00:29:59] **David Crabill:** Now, you've talked about doing the custom orders and you've also talked about doing the events. But I know you do wholesale as well. You have a commercial kitchen. So when did you Start to do wholesale?

[00:30:13] **Matt Rosen:** I want to say that was 2019. That was just a little over a year but it's just I guess it's just something else that I almost stumbled into. My wife has a coworker who she and her husband have, her husband does it full time and his wife then helps him when she's not at her, at her job.

[00:30:31] a 9 to 5 job, so to speak and they raise crickets for human consumption. So they do like cricket flour and, and things like that, and they have a commercial kitchen where she would bake like molasses cookies and like one or two different baked good products in their commercial kitchen.

[00:30:47] And so when she found out I was doing this. said, Hey, Matt, would you be willing to, and this is at the time I was doing granola bars. They said, would you be willing to come in and Tweak your granola bar recipe and add our cricket powder and maybe even some whole crickets to your granola bars to make it more like a protein packed granola bar for us.

[00:31:05] If you do that, you can just use our commercial kitchen whenever you want. As long as you bake these granola bars for us when we get orders, you can use the commercial kitchen anytime you want to make your shortbread cookies. So, that was just a Stumbled into that, I guess, uh, if you will, but just kind of got lucky with that.

[00:31:21] And that was my first commercial kitchen. The fall of 2019 is when I started selling, wholesale and shipping.

[00:31:27] **David Crabill:** Now, obviously you have to have the kitchen. Were there other things that you needed to do to start wholesaling?

[00:31:34] **Matt Rosen:** Yep, you need the commercial kitchen here in Minnesota where the wholesale food manufacturing falls under the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. I think some states might fall under, like, their Department of Health or something, but ours falls under the Department of Agriculture.

[00:31:50] So the Department of Ag has to come in and inspect not only the kitchen, they have to inspect my process. So they want to see me making the dough, they want to see me baking the cookies, they want to see me packaging the cookies so yeah, it was more than just inspecting the kitchen, they actually inspect the process to see how I'm producing these cookies.

[00:32:08] And uh, being a shortbread cookie. non potentially hazardous as you know because it's cottage food. So, I don't want to say they're not super strict but it's a different inspection. It's something that's like meats and cheeses and things that have a greater propensity to potentially causing a hazard to consumers.

[00:32:27] So, yeah, once they inspect that, then it's just, uh, it's a wholesale food manufacturing license. I could have gone the retail food processor route but most of my sales, it just boils down to where most of your sales come from. And most of my sales were going to come from Me selling to coffee shops, grocery stores, and things like that.

[00:32:44] So, where the retail side would be, if I wanted to open up my own brick and mortar, then I would have had to do the retail food license.

[00:32:51] **David Crabill:** Now you said that that was your first commercial kitchen. So how many commercial kitchens have you been through at this point?

[00:32:58] **Matt Rosen:** just two. So that was the one that I started out in. And then I met a friend through the farmer's markets and he does gourmet flavored popcorn. He wasn't into cottage food. He's always been in a commercial kitchen, but his lease was up, his rent was going to skyrocket and he found a commercial kitchen space.

[00:33:17] It was Almost like a factory, I guess, if you will, because it's more than just a commercial kitchen. It's a whole production area. There's a shipping

and receiving area. It's a 4,000 square foot building. He founded this building and he called me up and he's like, Matt, are you ready to grow your business?

[00:33:30] And I said, well, what are you talking about? He said, well, I found a building. It's too big for me, but I think it would be perfect for both of us to share the space. And so I was like, well, you know, I, no promises, but I'll go, I'll go look at it. And so we both went out and, uh, and looked at it. And yeah. It was perfect.

[00:33:47] I just have probably a thousand square feet of it where I make the cookies and there's an oven where I put all my cookies on a cookie sheet onto a rack and I can bake about 40 dozen cookies in 10 minutes. It's a walk in oven so I just slide the whole rack full of baking sheets in there and 10 minutes later I've got roughly 40 dozen shortbread cookies if I want to put that many in at one time.

[00:34:08] So. That's the commercial kitchen that I'm currently in. So, I went from one to this one, and so that's where I'm currently at.

[00:34:14] **David Crabill:** Wow. So did this facility come with all this equipment, or is this your friend's equipment that he installed?

[00:34:22] **Matt Rosen:** So the funny thing is that the building that they found used to be a cookie factory. I mean, Just sheer coincidence, but, like I said, it's a walk in oven, so that was already there. It came with all the stainless steel tables. I bought my own fridge. my own mixers.

[00:34:38] Uh, I brought my own utensils. It came with baking sheets because it was a, uh, cookie factory prior to us moving in. So, my initial expenses to get in was minimal in comparison to what it may cost to get into a brand new commercial kitchen. ,

[00:34:56] **David Crabill:** Wow. That is very different from most people's experience trying to find a commercial kitchen. I mean, I feel like most people really struggle and they finally find a space and take forever to retrofit it, and it sounds like it was just almost meant to be in this case.

[00:35:10] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, yeah, just another example of you never know where, where the next opportunity is going to pop up. Like, just stumbling upon a cookie business and then just having this new commercial kitchen brought to my attention when I really wasn't even looking for it. Now, do you partially own the space or do you just rent it out from this other person?

[00:35:31] Yeah, we both just rent, he leases it and then I sublease this 1, 000 square feet from him, so we don't own the building at all, we just, we're renting it.

[00:35:41] **David Crabill:** And how much of your baking now is done in the commercial kitchen versus at home?

[00:35:47] **Matt Rosen:** I still do the majority of my baking here at home. The commercial kitchen is a 35 minute drive just one way just to get to it. It's outside of the Twin Cities metro area, So the downside to having reasonable rent is you have to drive a long way to get there.

[00:36:04] So it's over an hour round trip. So I really make sure that if I'm going out there it has to be almost worth it, if you will. So a lot of the B2B things that I'm doing, I can still do those right here at home just because the business is buying it from me and then they're giving it away to their clients.

[00:36:21] So you know, I'm still within the cottage food laws. So the majority of it is here at home. I would say probably 90 to 95%. I am right here at home.

[00:36:28] **David Crabill:** Well, clearly you're scaling up quite a bit and it reminds me of a picture I saw on your Facebook account, which was a A Uline delivery of crinkle paper.

[00:36:42] **Matt Rosen:** Yes.

[00:36:43] **David Crabill:** I don't think I've seen that much crinkle paper in life.

[00:36:48] **Matt Rosen:** yeah. That is a prime example of being new to something and not knowing what you're doing, because I was like, okay, well I need crinkle paper, so I'm gonna order, I think I ordered. I'm probably way off, but 70 to 80 pounds of crinkle paper.

[00:37:04] I ordered it and my wife left to go to work or something and she opened up the garage door and there was a pallet sitting on the driveway. She's like, what is this? And she took a picture of it and she's like, can you explain this? And I was like, oh my gosh. Oops. So, yeah, I just needed to find storage for it. But yeah, a prime example of ordering something when you're not really familiar with exactly what it is that you're ordering.

[00:37:31] **David Crabill:** Yeah, just to describe us a little bit. I mean, you said a pallet, but I mean, it seems like it's even bigger than a pallet. It's this massive,

boxes and boxes of paper. and I, I did want to ask if you ran out of it, cause I think that was what, two and a half years ago. so you did go through it all.

[00:37:45] **Matt Rosen:** I went through all of it in actually a year and a half. So, I went through it a lot faster. So, initially it was a big joke, but then after I went through it and I had to reorder, then it wasn't so funny anymore. Like, oh, okay, well, yeah, we just did it. Now it makes sense.

[00:38:02] You actually, that was what you needed. You didn't need to order that much at one time, but I think I've reordered probably two or three times since then. Not that quantity. I've scaled back on my quantities ordered since then, but it was on a pallet and gosh, I'm six feet tall and I bet it probably came up to my waist and the whole pallet was full.

[00:38:19] So yeah, it was a big shipment. It came on a truck.

[00:38:24] **David Crabill:** Well, clearly you're doing a lot of sales, a lot of orders. I know you have your custom orders, your corporate orders. What is your wholesale looking like? Where are you selling to and how often are you having to restock?

[00:38:37] **Matt Rosen:** So currently, I've kind of scaled back a little bit on the uh, wholesale, and for anybody listening, wholesale is It's a tough go. I mean, it is all about quantity because you have to lower your price so much you're hardly making anything and so, So I haven't put a whole lot of focus on selling through the wholesale. But I do have a coffee shop here in Minnesota that they order from me. every probably two to three weeks and they order anywhere from 35 to 45 dozen cookies and I package them in packs of four cookies in each pack and they're heat sealed. So, they keep my wholesale business afloat here that they order uh, they order just one flavor of cookies. you know, they make a dessert and then they add my cookie to it. At this point it's really just those two but there's a financial planning firm that I send out weekly birthday boxes. Every Monday they send out a list, here's who has birthdays next week.

[00:39:35] And so, every week I ship out birthday boxes to their clients all over the US. So, sometimes it's. Two or three clients, and then sometimes it's 15-18 clients for that week. So, that also has obviously been a huge benefit to my wholesale business. So Now you mentioned the wholesale challenges with pricing, which we haven't talked about. So. Your pricing, what does it look like for markets? What does it look like for these custom orders and for wholesale?

[00:40:05] yeah, so when I go to events, markets, and vendor shows and things like that, I'll put three cookies. I put three cookies in and my cookies are probably roughly two inches in diameter. I put three cookies in a pack and depending on the flavor, the blueberry lemon I would sell for four dollars for three cookies.

[00:40:24] Just plain vanilla or what I call confetti, which is an almond flavored cookie with sprinkles in it. Tastes similar to a spritz cookie, if you've ever tried that. That would be 3 just because I'm not adding any dried fruit to it or chocolate or anything. So, those are packs of three. on my website, if you're, if, uh, just a local order, if you're ordering a dozen cookies, say the blueberry lemon, it's 13 for a dozen cookies.

[00:40:48] and wholesale I'm selling those for \$2 for a pack of four. So It's a significant difference between selling at a farmer's market or,

[00:40:57] **David Crabill:** Yeah, you know, I feel like most people have a different take on wholesale. Like most people actually push more into wholesale once they get in because they don't have to work on the marketing or they don't have to work on trying to get more customers. They just have to make the product and deliver it.

[00:41:14] Especially if they have a commercial kitchen like you do, where they can make a lot. So I just wanted to dig a little bit more into that perspective of yours, which is you know, you're trying to shy away from wholesale. Do you think it's because you, you like the marketing aspect, you like to engage with people, or you just, because these corporate orders are just working so well for you?

[00:41:33] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, the corporate orders, they're paying retail prices, so they're ordering right off my website. So, the profit margins on a corporate order is probably 75 percent higher than what I'm getting. Selling a pack of four cookies wholesale. When I first got my commercial kitchen, it was a grind.

[00:41:51] I took free samples to coffee shops and bakeries and breweries and grocery stores, and it was a grind. It was a struggle. And I just, I wasn't gaining any momentum. in the wholesale market. So yes, you don't have to market it and attend events and things like that, but it's a grind on the flip side of it.

[00:42:09] You need to actually procure those accounts. Well, with me doing pre packaged baked goods, a lot of these coffee shops are like, oh, well, we bake

our own stuff or we don't sell pre packaged. And it was a bit of a struggle for me to get into sort of grocery stores and coffee shops and things like that.

[00:42:25] So, I think That was very discouraging to me. But then when this B2B uh, doing the custom orders and custom labeling came about, I saw that, the profit margins and they're, usually they're ordering just as much as say a wholesale account would order.

[00:42:39] So, but I'm getting retail prices and retail profit margins compared to a wholesale profit margin. so that's why I kind of. not really steered away from it. I'm always open to a new wholesale account, but I don't focus a lot of my time and energy into it.

[00:42:53] and, with these custom labeling, they do the labels. They create their own stickers, their own labels. they just have to get them to me and I put their sticker on instead of putting my sticker on. So, it, it's, It's not even really a whole lot more work than what I'm already doing anyway.

[00:43:06] I'm just putting their sticker on instead of my sticker. so my profit margins were a lot better and that's the biggest reason why I've shied away from putting too much focus on the wholesale side.

[00:43:15] **David Crabill:** I don't feel like too many cottage food businesses basically white label their products, right? Like, allow other businesses to put their own labels on the products. How did you come about doing that?

[00:43:27] **Matt Rosen:** It came from a customer actually uh, this law firm. They reached out and they said, hey, we want to order your cookies. We want to, you know, have the packs of three like you do, these are for our employees, and it's for what they call the desk drop. Meaning, one evening they were going to go by and just put a pack of cookies on everybody's desk. And so they said, could you put our logo on there since these are going to our employees? I was like, well, sure. I mean, I have all my information on my ingredient label on the back, all the required cottage food information on the back. So, yeah, I can put your sticker.

[00:43:59] If you just give me the stickers, I'll put those on and instead of mine. So it actually, it all came about from a customer asking me if I could do it and, The nice thing about being a cottage food producer, you run your own business, you make your own decisions and you can be flexible in that sense. That's where it all started.

[00:44:15] So then I just started advertising, hey I can do custom labeling, you just gotta give me the labels and I'll put your label on here. And businesses love it. it's cross branding and it's marketing they're giving a homemade box of cookies instead of, hey, here's a coffee mug, hey, here's a lanyard, you know, some of the traditional gifts, if you will, to show your appreciation to customers and clients.

[00:44:36] They're giving a box of homemade cookies and in my case, it doesn't hurt that it's a veteran owned business. so now this law firm and these other businesses. You can say, oh yeah, we are huge supporters of veteran owned businesses so it's a fantastic way of cross branding for you and your customer who is giving them to their clients.

[00:44:56] **David Crabill:** Now, you mentioned that the cookies are like two to three inches in diameter. They look pretty thin. Do you know how heavy your cookies are, like in terms of ounces?

[00:45:07] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, so I know wholesale because I have to weigh them and I have to put the measurements on there. So a pack of four, depending on the flavor, is probably a little under two ounces. So it's, An ounce and a half to an ounce and three quarters for four cookies.

[00:45:21] So yeah, they're pretty thin and they're only two inches. And so people are like, oh, I can eat all four and I don't have to feel guilty.

[00:45:27] **David Crabill:** Alright, yeah, so that's interesting. So, four cookies is about two ounces, and even though you're wholesaling those for two dollars I think, those would retail for like closer to four dollars, right?

[00:45:40] **Matt Rosen:** Yep. they're selling them for anywhere from four to four and a half dollars at the coffee shop and things.

[00:45:47] **David Crabill:** And sort of a, a standard. In the cookie world is a dollar an ounce. I'm sure you've heard that. So these cookies are going for double the standard. Have you experienced any pushback because of the size or the price?

[00:46:03] **Matt Rosen:** Very little. you know, I will have somebody come up to me at a farmer's market and say, four dollars for three cookies, I can get a pack of Oreos for five dollars. Well, these aren't Oreos. So, there's one difference. But yeah, no, I, I freely admit that my cookies are on the spendier, expensive side.

[00:46:23] But, when people ask me about it, I tell them, well, I'm using organic dried fruit, like the blueberries are organic dried blueberries. zesting a lemon. I'm putting actual lemon juice in there where you're not going to find that at a grocery store. So, I don't get a lot of pushback.

[00:46:39] But every now and again, yeah, somebody will, Telling me that I'm crazy and they're not going to spend that kind of money.

[00:46:44] **David Crabill:** Have you ever experimented with different sizes of cookies or thicker cookies? Or would it just throw everything off?

[00:46:52] **Matt Rosen:** Everything is hand sliced by me with a chef's knife and a cutting board, so I think if I was to try to, do a thicker cookie and, I mean, I've got the times, of course, anybody who's baked, got times just right, their recipe is dialed in I think if I was to try to change up and do a thicker cookie or I have experimented and rolled the logs out a little smaller so they end up being more like an inch to an inch and a half, almost.

[00:47:16] Like a bite size. I have done that before but thickness wise it's usually the same thickness every time.

[00:47:23] **David Crabill:** Now it sounds like you're running quite a lot of business. Quite a lot of sales and orders. Do you have any help, any employees or anything like that?

[00:47:33] **Matt Rosen:** I don't. Well, my family, they'll help me pack and things like that when I get super busy, So yeah, my wife will help me pack. She won't do any of the baking or the making the dough anything like that. She'll put stickers on packaging and she'll help put cookies into the packages, but other than that, no employees where I'm at in my business are perfect for me so I don't have to hire employees.

[00:47:56] So the nice thing about that is when I go on vacation, I'm on vacation. I don't have to worry about an employee calling me and saying, Matt, the mixer broke, or Matt, the oven doesn't work. I can actually enjoy vacation, but on the flip side of that, of course, we all know as an entrepreneur, when you're on vacation and you're not making cookies, you're not making money either.

[00:48:13] So, that's a, uh, a trade off that I'm willing to do.

[00:48:17] **David Crabill:** Shifting the subject a little bit, I know that you're a member of the cottage food association in Minnesota, and you've advocated for the cottage food law in Minnesota. And you're just a big proponent for the association. Can you just share a little bit about it?

[00:48:32] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah. So the Cottage Food Association just become my best friends and, anytime they ask me to help out with, testifying in front of the House or the Senate or, any of those committees, I'm all for it because the cottage food law uh, it wouldn't be here without, them being at the Capitol and, and, speaking for all of us and pushing and quote unquote, bugging these representatives to give us, a little more leeway and to give us a better law to help us succeed.

[00:49:02] So, Pretty much when the cottage food, Minnesota Cottage Food Association asks me to jump, I just tell them how high and where to, but without the cottage food law and the cottage food association, I wouldn't be where I'm at right now, which means I wouldn't be waking up every day and saying, I get to bake cookies today and I get to make people happy with, what I do.

[00:49:20] Yeah, I'm a huge proponent of the Minnesota Cottage Food Association.

[00:49:24] **David Crabill:** I have to agree with you, actually, you probably wouldn't have a very good law if it weren't for likes of Shelly Erickson, she's been on the podcast before, and a number of other individuals in your state, because for whatever reason, Minnesota's Ag Department makes it very difficult, and you definitely need a very strong advocacy team there, so, it's one of the only states, I think, that has A statewide association.

[00:49:48] And it's pretty impressive to see just how strong the community is in Minnesota. And I'm constantly seeing amazing cottage food stories coming out of your state.

[00:49:58] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, and like you said, that's thanks to Shelley and Jen and just the whole, and they do this, they're volunteers. That's what I don't think a lot of people may not understand. They're volunteers. They're going to the Capitol. Face to face with these representatives, they're on Zoom calls, they're emailing, phone calls.

[00:50:16] they have other jobs and so they're, they're volunteers and so they, that's what I think a lot of people don't understand is they're giving up their time

to help us move forward, help us succeed. So, like I said, when they say jump, I say how high and where to, and how many times.

[00:50:31] **David Crabill:** Well, you've become very involved in the cottage food community, and I know that's extended out to another project of yours, the Cottage Foodie. Can you share a little bit about how that started?

[00:50:43] **Matt Rosen:** Yeah, so the Cottage Foodie, it's an online directory of cottage food producers. It started here in Minnesota so you'll notice that most of our members right now are in Minnesota, we've now expanded to 10 different states. It came about because I'm part of the Minnesota Cottage Food Association Facebook group.

[00:51:00] And I would see, initially, a whole bunch of cottage food producers here in Minnesota saying, Hey, I have a customer who needs it. Three dozen of these cookies in Apple Valley, is anybody available? you know, it would be a whole bunch of People saying I am, I am, and things like that. And so I just saw people reaching out, asking who's available, or who's a cottage food producer in Stillwater?

[00:51:18] so it just got me thinking, like, well, why don't we have, like, a directory? why isn't there something where I can just go to a website and say, Hey, Cottage food producer in Stillwater and see who's there and so that was Initially what sparked my desire to create this directory, but it very quickly became Well, wait a minute.

[00:51:34] I need to advertise this to consumers and tell consumers not just Advertise this to cottage food producers. This needs to be consumer, to help you find a cottage food producer. So, uh, it very quickly changed to marketing to consumers and educating consumers on the cottage food community and being able to.

[00:51:53] find local cottage food producers who do everything, of course, we all know what cottage food producers make, but, you know, sourdough bread, to pies, to, of course the custom decorated cookies, and so, that's where it all started, I'm not talented enough to create that kind of a website, so I brought the idea to somebody else in the, as luck would have it, in the Eden Prairie Chamber of Commerce.

[00:52:14] I brought it to them, they're a, uh, a digital marketing company, and I said, here's my idea. Can you build this for me? And can you run it for me? they

said, well, let us, you talk about this and we'll get back to you. And they came back to me a few days later and they said, yep, we absolutely can do this.

[00:52:28] we love the idea and we love your passion behind this. So we actually want to, instead of just building it for you and running it, we actually want to be part of it. So they came on as investing partners. And so they do the whole SEO. They make sure that the website has all the search engine optimization.

[00:52:45] Up to speed and any changes that I need to make to the website, they do all of that. So, it's been fun. It's a passion project, but it's more than just a project. At some point, I'm going to have to stop slicing and baking shortbread cookies. Physically, I'm just not going to be able to do it anymore.

[00:53:00] And so, Uh, this is something that I want to be able to continue long into the future being able to help market other cottage food producers all over the United States.

[00:53:08] **David Crabill:** When did you start this project?

[00:53:12] **Matt Rosen:** So the idea came to me last summer and they designed the website and created the website and we just went live with the directory May 1st of 2024. So we're about eight months into it, nine months?

[00:53:25] **David Crabill:** So what would you say were your expectations for the site? And, compared to what. Has actually happened. Has it matched your expectations or what have you learned from it?

[00:53:38] **Matt Rosen:** So far, It's exceeded my expectations. Initially our whole plan was to just make it a Minnesota. I mean, I wanted to make it national. That was always my goal, but to make it a national directory this quickly was not in the plans. we were just hoping for the first.

[00:53:54] It took a year or so just to build up enough Minnesota cottage food producers just to test it out to make sure that, you know, it was a viable product and people wanted to use it and consumers would come to it. but three months into it, I think in August, I reached out and formed a partnership with Borderlands Bakery and My Custom Bakes.

[00:54:13] And they loved the idea as well. My Custom Bakes has actually incorporated a page on their website that links directly to the Cottage Foodie. So

with their national presence, that just accelerated our plans a bit. So, it's been a phenomenal partnership with them, a collaboration partnership.

[00:54:32] We've done a lot of advertising. Together, the three of us are all going to be at Cookie Con in Reno this year, and we're going to share a double booth. It's just been a fantastic partnership with them.

[00:54:44] just forming that partnership so quickly that kind of accelerated our plans to, well, I guess we're going to take this nationwide now. So, it's been fun. It's been great progress. Obviously, just like any other business, we want it to go viral the next day, but like Sergeant Shortbread, I'm just going to grow this just as quickly as the business grows itself.

[00:55:03] just to grow at its own pace.

[00:55:05] **David Crabill:** Well, obviously you've come a long way with your business. As you look ahead, where would you like to go?

[00:55:11] **Matt Rosen:** As I look ahead, I see myself just growing the cottage foodie, the directory. The cottage food industry and the community has just obviously become a passion of mine and I love my Sergeant Shortbread business, and I've seen some good successes as we just talked about the Sergeant Shortbread realm, but I want to be able to help other cottage food producers.

[00:55:33] And so that's my priority, I guess, moving forward, is if I can grow that, if I can help other cottage food producers to just help them in any way I can to achieve their dream of, A, moving into a commercial kitchen, B, leaving their full time jobs so that they can do what they love, which is baking canning or whatever product it is that they make, then that's what I want to do. That has now become my life's goal is to be able to help other cottage food producers achieve their dreams.

[00:56:00] **David Crabill:** So do you see yourself scaling back on the cookie business?

[00:56:05] **Matt Rosen:** I do. I don't know when. It's not like I'm going to do that tomorrow. I still need to pay the bills, so, but I do eventually, I will be uh, scaling back. At some point I'm going to retire and my wife and I have big plans to travel once we both reach retirement age, and I know in order to achieve our retirement dream.

[00:56:26] I have to scale back and eventually at some point I will stop. Baking cookies because I can't bake cookies on the road while I'm in an RV or, you know, or wherever I'm traveling. So, I do know that that day is coming. And so, at least with the cottage foodie and the directory, that's something that I can still do in retirement wherever I'm at, as long as I have an internet connection, I can log in and help promote and market cottage food producers.

[00:56:49] So, that's kind of why my overall goal is to. Grow that and at some point scale back shortbread cookies.

[00:56:55] **David Crabill:** Well, you've been running your business for almost seven years now. So what has driven you to continue the business and grow the business as much as you have?

[00:57:06] **Matt Rosen:** My customers, that's the only thing that keeps me going. I do love baking, but it's my customers. I've had customers that literally have been with me from day one. There's a tour and events company here in the metro area that, I mean, it's only once a year, They order. Cookies for a, uh, they do guided tours on tour buses and things like that throughout the state of Minnesota.

[00:57:30] they come back to me every single year and they've told me they're like, as long as you're still baking cookies, we're coming back. So, that's what keeps me going. That's what drives me to get up every day and bake shortbread cookies and zest lemons and oranges and slice cookies by hand with a chef's knife and a cutting board.

[00:57:49] Yeah, that really is what keeps me going and drives me to uh, Continue this business. it's the customers who enjoy my product and I get to uh, visit with on a regular basis.

[00:57:59] **David Crabill:** Well, Matt, thank you so much for coming on. You have a fascinating story and I know everyone listening loved hearing it. Now, if people would like to learn more, how can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:12] **Matt Rosen:** Yes, I have a website, sergeantshortbread.com. it's spelled like the military version of sergeant, so that's S E R G E A N T. Some people tend to spell it S A, but it's SERGEANT.

[00:58:28] They can find me on Instagram and Facebook. It's sergeant shortbread if they're interested in the directory. Same thing, Instagram and

Facebook, it's The Cottage Foodie. And the directory itself is thecottagefoodie.com.

[00:58:40] **David Crabill:** Well, awesome. Thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:58:45] **Matt Rosen:** Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it.

[00:58:48] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:58:54] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/133.

[00:59:00] 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.

[00:59:12] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

[00:59:23] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.