

Six Figures From a Home Kitchen: Jennie Teske's Gluten-Free Bakery

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 Jennie Teske. But before I begin, this Thursday, I will be giving a live workshop about how to start a cottage food business the right way.

I have seen so many cottage food entrepreneurs over the years that handicap themselves when trying to get their businesses off the ground. So I thought, "What if I was starting a cottage food business over again today? How would I do it?" That's what this workshop is about. It will be this Thursday, August 20th, 2026, and it is completely free to join. You just have to register, which you can do by going to forrager.com/workshop. And if you can't make it live, I will send a replay afterward. Again, to register, go to forrager.com/workshop. I hope to see you there.

All right, so I have Jennie on the show today. She lives in North Branch, Minnesota, and sells gluten-free baked goods with her cottage food business, The Silly Yak. I got to meet Jennie at Cottage Foodiecon this past April, and it was actually a previous guest of mine, Chef Alina, who introduced us. She said, "David, you've got to have Jennie on your podcast. She is crushing it with her cottage food business." And she is. Jennie is one of the only people I've met that has a six-figure cottage food business.

And as of this recording, she is still using residential ovens and a couple regular KitchenAid mixers. Jennie's business grew so much that she decided to quit her job and pursue this full-time, and it just keeps growing.

But Jennie stands out to me as being very different from many of my other podcast guests. Although she has been extremely successful selling at [00:02:00] markets, she does not have a super bubbly personality or cute and fancy packaging, and she is not salesy at all. But what she does have are exceptional products, effective systems, and a strong passion for helping her community, and that has been a recipe for success.

And with that, let's jump right into this episode welcome to the show, Jennie. Nice to have you

Jennie Teske: Nice to see you, David

David Crabill: Um, well, this has been quite the ride, quite the journey over the past few years, and I know you, you, your journey really extends well beyond the beginning of your business. So take me back to the beginning. Like, how did you get into this gluten-free world?

Jennie Teske: So, uh, my husband and his mother are, uh, well, his mom is diagnosed celiac. Um, and she was diagnosed very late in life, [00:03:00] in her late 60s, and she's in her, um, mid-80s now. So she's been dealing with it for quite a few years now. Um, but my husband

started showing symptoms, and I, um, told him we should just try, just try taking him off of everything gluten.

Um, see what it was like for two weeks. Uh, it, it worked. His symptoms improved, and he was like, "Okay, let's go get tested. Let's figure it out if, if it is celiac." Um, turns out you have to be actively ingesting gluten to have the celiac test, and for like three or four weeks. So he's like, "There's no way I can go back to eating gluten, um, just to get tested."

There's no medication. Um, it's just a, "Yep, I have it." So that was it. He didn't wanna go back. So we call him [00:04:00] our undiagnosed celiac

David Crabill: Got it. So yeah, I mean, so he, he probably is. But this, this is not something that you deal with, right? You know, but it's, it's become your business. But I saw that you've been, what, like gluten-free household for almost 17 years now, something like that, right?

Jennie Teske: Close. Yeah. So when, when, we're empty nesters now. Um, and so when our kids were little, we, we s- we still had gluten in the house. It, it was too expensive. Um, back then the products weren't very good tasting at all, and so we didn't wanna subject the kids to having to eat gluten-free. Um, in 2020 his mom moved in with us just as our youngest was leaving.

Um, and since his mom is the diagnosed celiac, we thought that would be the great time just to kind of rid the entire house of gluten, um, to keep her [00:05:00] safe and our sanity. Um, and so we've been a, a completely gluten free, gluten-free household since 2020.

David Crabill: I see. um, you, you very well know, the pain of being, uh, having a gluten-free person in the household, right? And having to juggle both. You know, you said you still had the gluten items with your kids. So what was that like? Like, what were those years like? Because I know that's the kind of pain you really cater to now in your business.

Jennie Teske: It was very difficult, and it's, and it's why we do that. It's, it's why we, um, strive to have a really good tasting product that you can be proud to serve your guests and your family, even if they do ingest gluten, uh, normally. If they, if they don't need to be gluten-free. Um, we don't want there to be a difference.

It... There's, there's a, there's a huge stigma around people with food allergies and intolerances [00:06:00] and, um, restrictions, dietary restrictions of, like, they're invited someplace, like a Thanksgiving dinner, and you either, um, risk getting sick and spending the next few days feeling awful, or you bring your own dish of something, and then that just feels weird of like everybody else is having this, you know, magnificent Thanksgiving dinner and, and here's your little piece of the pie that you brought.

You know, the crustless pumpkin pie. And, um, so we really try to, to reduce that, that feeling of, um, being different

David Crabill: Yeah. Now, can people tell the difference with your products? Because I know that's one of the things is that your products are excellent products, but do you feel like there's still a difference?

Jennie Teske: With the bread products, yes. Um, but when you get into the, the treats and the, and the, you know, the [00:07:00] cookies and the pies and the, um, muffins, I say no. There, I, you can't tell the difference

David Crabill: but what about with the bread items? Like, do people say that, you know, "Oh, is it compromised?" Do people feel like it's compromised? Do people who aren't gluten still think, "Wow, this is, this is really good bread"?

Jennie Teske: There's a few people who don't need to be gluten-free that still enjoy our bread, but, um, it's such a different texture that most people who don't need to be gluten-free, they're gonna, they're gonna choose the, the gluten bread over a gluten-free item. But for being gluten-free, um, those who do need it are really appreciative of our bread, and it's one of our best sellers

David Crabill: Yeah, 'cause y- I saw you gave up on bread, I mean, you've been trying to cater to your husband's gluten-free needs for a long time, and you said [00:08:00] you just, bread was too hard for you. So, um, wh- what, what changed there?

Jennie Teske: Uh, honestly, I found Chef Alina and her bread recipe. Um, we had a vacation planned, uh, in the winter of 2023, um, and it fell through at the last minute. So we were both off, like a, a week off of work with nothing to do. Um, and I, and I started experimenting again with bread products, um, and ran across Chef Alina's bread recipe, and we gave it a try, and that's what changed it for him.

He c- he... So with most gluten-free bread, you have to toast it. Um, so he was, he was toasting sandwiches in the morning to take with him to work to eat at lunch. Um, and by then they would just get, you know, weird and, and yucky. Um, so this was a bread that he actually didn't have to toast, and he [00:09:00] looked forward to having sandwiches again

David Crabill: Yeah. Chef Alina was on episode 153 of the podcast. Great episode, and she's the one who made this connection and i- introduced you to, uh, me. So I'm very grateful for her, and we'll put a link to her episode in the, the show notes too. But, um, this bread was kinda like a turning point, it sounds like.

Do you feel like this business would've happened if you hadn't discovered the bread side of things? Like, 'cause it seems like a big pain point for a lot of people that need to be gluten-free

Jennie Teske: Honestly, I don't think I would've done it. Um, my husband was eating a couple bites of, of a sandwich again, and he was like, "Oh my gosh, you have to do something with this. We have to, we have to get this into more people's hands, um, so that they know there's, there's different options out there." We didn't know what that was gonna look like or how that was gonna work, but he was just like

I, I don't even know how many loaves of bread I [00:10:00] made that first month, 'cause he's like, "Can I have ... I, I went through that loaf of bread. Can I have more? Can ... " You know, "Now what flavor can you do? Can we, can we do something a little bit meatier, like whole grain-ish? How about like a, um, a mock rye?" 'Cause the rye grain itself contains gluten.

Um, so he was just looking for different ways to, to have a, a, a different flavor of bread instead of just a plain white again.

David Crabill: All right, so it was the quality of this bread that, you know, encouraged you to actually get it into more people's hands. So when did you, like, discover this bread from Chef Alina or, yeah, inspired by her, I guess? And then, like, how long did it take for you to actually start selling it?

Jennie Teske: that's, that's funny. Um, I think it was February of 2023, and we were at our first farmer's market that May. So we turned it around in just two months

David Crabill: [00:11:00] Wow. now it, it looked to me like you have a very large demand for gluten-free products in your area. Is that correct?

Jennie Teske: I think so. I think so. I, we also have, um, a few people who drive quite a distance from us, um, to, to, to purchase. Um, it also just happened that as soon as I got my cottage registration, um, and we were like, "Okay, let's sell. Now where are we going to sell?" Um, through Facebook I found another baker at a market who was, um, trying to do both gluten-free and regular baking, and she was looking to give up the gluten-free side of it.

Um, and so it just happened that that was the market that was very close to us. Um, and so I, I knew there was some kind of demand because she was already selling some products. [00:12:00] But also as a gluten-free and celiac household, I knew that there was going to be, um, much bigger demand than what she was currently seeing because she was, she was trying to manage both.

And there are some, um, some with celiac who, who are more skeptical and more nervous of trusting a baker who does both

David Crabill: Yeah, I saw from one of your earlier posts that, you know, you've waited 45 minutes at the fair for the gluten-free vendor. You know, like, there is this demand. Why do you think the demand wasn't met earlier?

Jennie Teske: I don't think there was somebody at that time doing, um, celiac safe baking, so only, only catering to gluten-free baking. Um, I also think that there's been just such a bad rap about gluten-free products in the past that, um, and still [00:13:00] I still currently, I guess there's, there's just some, some gluten-free products that don't taste good.

Um, they're, they're, they're gritty. Um, the, the flavor profiles are just off. There's a little bit of an, of an aftertaste. Um, and so we're very mindful of our products to make sure that, that it's

something that somebody who is not gluten-free can also enjoy. And usually those things are what kind of turn somebody off.

There's a, there's a gritty f- um, texture to it. Um, like it feels like they're eating sand for some products. They're very dry. Um, there's just, there's a bad aftertaste that happens on some things. Um, and so none of our products have that. And so I, I think we're able to meet demand that people didn't really realize that they were missing until they had something good and fresh and of high quality

David Crabill: And with [00:14:00] you being one of the first, if not the first bakery offering celiac-safe products, um, how do you feel like your bakery has impacted people's lives?

Jennie Teske: I know it's had a very positive impact on people. I, I'm not one to really talk about the... I'm not gonna be the one to be like, "Oh, my cookies are the best ever." Like, that's, that's not mine. I let, I let the orders, I let the lines at the market, um, customers coming back, the reviews, uh, they all speak for themselves

David Crabill: Have you had any moments or stories? Have people tried your product that really stand out to you?

Jennie Teske: We had one, um, one lady a few years ago, I think it was like the first year that we were in business, um, literally came back and, and was crying because her... It was her f- it [00:15:00] was her first sandwich in many years. And, and she now orders 10 loaves at a time just so she never has to run out. Um, we were doing another event, and my mom was helping 'cause it was a, it was a bigger event.

Um, and by then, like Mark and I were used to seeing people like gushing, and, "Oh my gosh," and, "And I have to get this," and, "I have to get that." But it was my mom's first experience where she saw a lady come running to our booth right, like a few minutes after we opened because she didn't wanna miss anything.

'Cause, things happen to sell out fairly quickly. Um, and so she, she was like running through the parking lot with her bags, and my mom kind of like noticed her, and she was like, "Okay, what's going on?" And then she was coming to us. And it was like, "Okay, okay, I just had to make sure nothing had sold out yet."

David Crabill: Wow. So clearly you have a superior product, right? And, you know, there's a lot of demand for it. Uh, so what [00:16:00] was your first market like? It sounds like it started at the farmers market in the, you know, late spring of 2023.

Started at the farmers market. What was that first market like?

Jennie Teske: Uh, unreal. I, before that first market, I was like, "Okay, this is gonna be like a little hobby. I'll, I'll bake a few loaves of bread, some chocolate chip cookies, you know, it's not gonna be a big deal." Um, before that my husband was like, "Okay, what are you gonna call the bakery? You have to have a logo. How about some business cards?"

Jennie Teske: and I was just like, "Eh, this is just gonna be like a fun little thing.

I'll go, you know, make 50 bucks a weekend. It's, you know, gonna be some date night money." Um, so we, we brought, I think, like 28 loaves, which seems like a lot. Um, but we had little mini loaves, uh, just from like a, a mini pan, because we weren't sure if people wanted to commit to a [00:17:00] whole loaf of bread without knowing us.

Like, we wanted a way to, to like, "Here's a little sample," that you had to pay for, but it, a, a smaller size, um, to kind of get them to trust us, taste the product. Um, and we sold out. We sold out of everything that very first market

David Crabill: Wow. So, what was your next market like?

Jennie Teske: we baked a little bit more. Um, I don't think it was a, a, a complete sellout. Um, and I think that's when we kind of learned the, um, even though you bake more product, it doesn't mean that more people will show up. So we learned about the seasonality of how, you know, weather and, and other activities going on in the, in the community kind of affect the foot traffic at a market.

Um, and so we learned to try to find like a this is what we're [00:18:00] going to bake instead of meeting, trying to meet, like, all the needs of every, every single person that we can

David Crabill: you know, I I saw a picture from your first market. Very simple, and it has just grown from there, right? You know, a lot of bakers will tell you, "Keep your menu simple. But it doesn't seem like you do that. It seems like you like, you make everything under the sun that's gluten-free.

I mean, uh, not, not literally, but you make a lot of products

Jennie Teske: I do. Yes

David Crabill: So what went into that decision?

Jennie Teske: Uh, it's what my husband and his family miss, or what I miss being able to just have in the house of like, "Ooh, yeah, that sounds really good." Like, you can't, you can't go out and buy a gluten-free oatmeal cream pie. Um, or, uh, if you, if you do find like a little mini cake, it's frozen. Um, and so it, our menu really is [00:19:00] impacted by, um, convenience and availability

David Crabill: So what do you currently sell? I mean, we're now three years into the business and your menu is pretty extensive. What, what do you sell today?

Jennie Teske: Uh, I think we have five or six different flavors of sandwich bread. hamburger and hot dog buns. muffins, cookies, scones with multiple flavors. pretzels, pizza crust. cinnamon rolls.

It took me a few years to perfect a really good gluten-free cinnamon roll.

But in the meantime, I felt like I had to have some kind of sweet, brunchy style bread. So we came up with what my husband named yak bites. Um, so it's our bread dough rolled in cinnamon and sugar. Uh, and then we have a cream cheese frosting and a homemade [00:20:00] caramel sauce that go along with both of those to dip.

Um, they kind of look like tater tots. A, a few people have come up and asked like, "Oh, tater tot hot dish?" And we're like, "No. Just yak bites." And we explain what they are. It's kind of like monkey bread without the caramel pulled over, poured over

David Crabill: So what would you say are some of your most successful items or most popular items?

Jennie Teske: Uh, all of the sandwich breads, um, cinnamon rolls for sure, um, pretzels, pizza crusts. I, they're all very popular. Um, cookies

David Crabill: Do you feel like pretty much anything that you put out is successful because it's gluten-free?

Jennie Teske: No. No. I, I think there, there's still some things that we do that are, like, they're, they're, they're okay. They're, like, they're not the best.

David Crabill: what have you sold that has [00:21:00] not sold well?

Jennie Teske: Well, it's certain flavors of things. So like maybe there's a flavor of a muffin that I was really excited about and it just didn't really go anywhere. Like it's the same basic recipe, but that, um, that didn't go over as well as I thought it would. Um- I can't think of really anything else that was just like

David Crabill: it sounds like most of the things you've sold have sold quite well, right? So,

So what was that first year like? You know, you started at the farmers market, sold out at your first market, and then take me through 2023. How did your business grow from there?

Jennie Teske: We had only committed to two farmers' markets a month. Uh, both my husband and I were still working full-time jobs. Um, and so we, we were like, time off-wise, um, we could only take a couple [00:22:00] Fridays off every month to do the farmers' market. Um, I thought when the market ended in October that, "Okay, like, that was great.

Like, see you again in May," kind of thing. Um, and then somebody was like, "Well, well, what are you gonna have for Thanksgiving? Can, can I order bread for my Thanksgiving dinner? Can you do a pie? Can you..." And I was like, "Oh, okay, sure." Um, baked all through Thanksgiving. And, and back in those times we were delivering things, so I was meeting people in grocery store parking lots or we were delivering their items to them.

Um, for Thanksgiving we just set our canopy tent out in our driveway and had coolers sitting on tables with people's orders in them, um, so that they could drive up and pick up their Thanksgiving orders. By Christmas I was exhausted [00:23:00] and burned out. I didn't offer anything for Christmas that year except for, um, a very limited number of people who had already contacted us asking for Thanksgiving, or I'm, um, Christmas cookies and, um, Christmas items. And then I thought I was done, and then the orders and the requests kind of kept coming in until May, um, when we started farmers' markets again.

David Crabill: And I, I saw that that farmers market does an indoor market, so you could have continued to do the farmers market during the winter, right?

Jennie Teske: Yes. That market runs, um, November through April. We, we chose not to do it that first year. Again, because I, I, I thought it was like, okay, we just run with the farmers market season

David Crabill: And so when you stopped and you decided not to do the winter farmers [00:24:00] market, you had every intention of starting up again the next summer, right? Yeah. So when did you feel like, "Okay, this, m- you know, is, is growing into a much bigger business than I ever thought it would be"?

Jennie Teske: Almost right away because I wasn't... I mean, I was expecting just to be able to bring, um, you know, a couple dozen cookies, a couple dozen Pop-Tarts. I, you know, grow the, the menu a little bit. Um, but by the middle of the summer, it, I knew that there was... It was something bigger than that. It w- this was, this was more than just a little hobby for us

David Crabill: And I know it eventually replaced your job. So when did it start to cross your mind like, "Oh, maybe, maybe this will become a full-time thing for me"?

Jennie Teske: Um, I fought that for as long as I could. [00:25:00] Um, and my husband finally, he was like, "You, you, you gotta give one up. Like, you, you can't just keep doing this." I, I was, um... Fortunately, we were still working from home, um, for my corporate job. Um, so my lunch hour, I was baking bread and cookies. And, um, before I started work, before I logged on every morning, I would bake a, a few things.

Um, and I, I was really burning myself out. Um, and so Mark said, "It's gotta be one or the other, and I, and I really think you should, you should leave your corporate job, and I, and I think, I think Silly is, is where it's at."

David Crabill: And so what was your corporate job? Like, what's your background in?

Jennie Teske: Supply chain management and purchasing

David Crabill: Do you feel like that background has impacted this business at all?

Jennie Teske: Absolutely. Yep

David Crabill: How so?

Jennie Teske: [00:26:00] I was used to pricing things. I was used to, um, staying on a, on a budget and, um, sourcing. Um, I think that's one way that I was able to really make this a profitable business for us, um, is by, um, sourcing our own ingredients. We make our own flour blend. Um, and I was able to keep the cost down on that by finding different outlets and avenues of, of, um, bulk 50 pound bags of ingredients

David Crabill: Hey, real quick, as I mentioned at the beginning, I'm giving a free live workshop this Thursday, August 20th, about how I would start a cottage food business if I was starting over again today. As I said, it is completely free to join, but you have to register, which you can do by going to [00:27:00] forrager.com/workshop.

And if you can't make it live, I will send a replay afterwards. Again, register by going to forrager.com/workshop. Now back to the show

You know, I, I did see that you said that you enjoyed your 9:00 to 5:00 job, right? You never saw yourself as an entrepreneur. So it, it sounds like you very much accidentally fell into this.

Why did you choose to pursue the Silly Yak and leave your corporate job instead of dropping the entrepreneurship thing?

Jennie Teske: Partly my husband's support. Um, he's, he's the biggest cheerleader that, that I have personally, um, in my life ever. Um, and so his willingness to be like, " Yeah, we're, we're gonna make it work. Like, w- we'll just, we'll figure it out. This is what you need to do." Um, and then also the customers. Like, [00:28:00] we've gotten to know them over the years.

Um, and I just, i- in the back of my mind, I, I just could not ever imagine coming to, to some of them and saying, "I'm, I'm sorry, but this is your last loaf of bread." Like I, I couldn't do that

David Crabill: I'm sure it felt risky to leave the stable career, the stable paycheck, right? Even as this thing was growing, what did it feel like when you made the decision to quit your job?

Jennie Teske: awful. I, to, to, to finally make that decision and put, put it in writing of like, " This is it." And I timed... I don't think I timed it super great. I did it, um, the beginning of November of 2024. Um, I, I wish I would've waited a little bit longer towards the winter, but, um, I kept seeing all these Thanksgiving orders coming in, and I, I, like, there's just no [00:29:00] way I can, I can do it

David Crabill: Why do you wish you had waited?

Jennie Teske: Because winter is the slower season. So, so that, you know, once we get past Christmas, um, January, February, March are all the demand drops off a little bit. It's, it's colder here in Minnesota. Um, the weather's unpredictable

David Crabill: Now, it's interesting that you quit your job in November 2024 because that is also the same time that you opened up the Yak Shack, right? So take me through that decision

Jennie Teske: So, um, I, I knew I couldn't keep up with, um, people coming to the house constantly. At that time we had dogs, and so, um, ringing the doorbells, it would kind of send the dogs into, into, um, disarray. Like it was just very loud and, and, um, not conducive to working from home. [00:30:00] Um, and then meeting people in, in parking lots and driving, like it just didn't feel like, it just didn't feel right.

Like, like we still do, we actually still do it, but, um, it just, there had to be a better way. There just was a, a, a bigger, better option. Around that same time I saw Wendy, from, little house and she had the, the drive-up bakery stand, and I was like, "That's it. This is what we have to do."

Um, and my husband was like, "Well, that's great, but it's, it's winter half the year in Minnesota, or a third of the year. So what are, what are you gonna do to keep your products from freezing?" And I was like, "Oh, okay." Well, then around that same time too, Wendy got that greenhouse. And so I was like, "That's what we're gonna do."

And he's like, "Um, but then you're gonna be battling with the sun, and you're constantly going to have..." Like, where, how our [00:31:00] driveway and where our house is, um, he's like, "You're, you're gonna be battling the sun." Like, "Okay." Like, "Well, then what are we gonna do, and how are we gonna do this?" Um, and he's like, "Let's just buy one of those old hickory sheds, and we can, we can remodel it to make it fit."

And, and again, it was like, "No, that's too much." Like, I, I, that's, I don't need something like that. And, and, um, very supportive, very, you know, like, "Yep, I think this is what we need to do." And I still fought it a little bit, 'cause I saw, I saw other bakers using more simple, um, designs Um, but now I see that they have bigger issues than we do.

Like, they deal with, um, birds and squirrels stealing product if it's just, like, an open, um, stand. So I'm, I'm glad we ended up going the route we did with it's, it's an actual shed. It's, it's, [00:32:00] um... You walk into it. We have it heated in the winter, um, air conditioning in the summer. Um, and, and at first it was just going to be some place for people to pick up their orders.

Like, everybody was going to pre-order, and I'd have a little shelf. But then as I was baking for that, I realized I had leftovers. Like, well, why don't I just try to sell the leftovers in the Yak Shack? Um, and that went really well. We did that for, um, Thanksgiving and Christmas orders. Um, and then I think it was the middle...

It was either the middle of December or the middle of January, like, "Okay, we're gonna do both." Like, I am going to bake for walk-ups, for grab and go. People can choose to buy a couple cookies if they want, um, when they pick up their order. Because the way that our, our ordering system is set up, there's a minimum.

[00:33:00] So, uh, you have to buy at least six cookies, or four Pop-Tarts, or four muffins. But the Yak Shack is set up like a farmers market. You can come up and buy a cook- a cookie, a muffin. Um, and so I thought people maybe instead of wanting to buy, like, a whole pack of something, they can just buy one or two. And then people started coming without even placing a pre-order.

Like, th- they, they just wanted another extension of the farmers market. And so that's how the weekly Yak Shack model was born

David Crabill: Yeah, no, it's become a really big thing recently. I mean, I recently had Melanie Scofield on the show. I mean, you probably are familiar with her. Um, you know, th- this concept has really grown, and you said you were, uh, kinda resisting this. Uh, was it just the cost of it, you know, the cost of the shed? Like, what, wh- where was the resistance [00:34:00] coming from?

Jennie Teske: The cost and the perman- permanency of it, of, of now we have a structure on our property and we have to care for it, and, you know, it's gotta be shoveled in the winter and landscaped in the summer to make it look appealing. So I think it was just, like, the cost and, like, it's kind of a big deal. Like, you can't just roll away a little cart and it's gone, and you can hide it in the back of your garage.

It's like front and center

David Crabill: well, so where are you located? Like, are, are you in a pretty convenient location for people to pick up and, like, treat this as a store?

Jennie Teske: yes and no. Like, we're not, we're not right off of a main road. Um, we're a couple miles from town, and we're in a, in a regular, like, household development

David Crabill: All right. So nobody's just like driving by and seeing it for the most part, right? They're [00:35:00] coming specifically to come to your little Yak Shack.

Jennie Teske: Yes Right.

David Crabill: Nice. And then, and that year, in that winter, I know you were running the Yak Shack, getting orders. People started coming even without pre-ordering. Were you also doing the indoor farmers market at that time?

Jennie Teske: Yes

David Crabill: take me through that. You, you made this kind of risky decision to quit your job, and then did the freedom from not having to spend all those hours in your corporate job actually translate into the growth of the Silly Yak?

Jennie Teske: I think so. Um, it, it also helped, um, around that time we moved, uh, the baking down to our, um, lower walkout level of our house. Um, so we set up, um, more ovens down

there, a prep area. That's where all [00:36:00] the, the storage of all of the ingredients and the packaging, like the whole thing moved downstairs. And so I had more room.

Um, I could better plan out production. Um, I think that's also when the menu kind of ramped up a little bit because I, I had more time to prep, and I had more time to do some recipe testing.

David Crabill: Yeah, I was wondering about your production, 'cause I know you have been selling a lot of product, and you're still running this out of your home. So what does that look like?

Jennie Teske: We have help. Um, so last year in, um, the spring of 2025, um, I hired, I hired my first person, and she would come over every time there was a, a bake. Um, and she would help package and label, and she would, um, she kept my sanity. She helped me count [00:37:00] 'cause, you know, I'm not good at, good at that. Um, so she kept my labels organized.

She printed them for me. Um, took out all the cookies, heat-sealed them, uh, and got everything ready for, uh, market season and orders

David Crabill: How has it been to have, you know, not necessarily an employee, but like, you know, a contractor or whatever, somebody helping you? Like, you- you're kind of turning into a manager at so- uh, to some degree. Is that something you had experience with in your past corporate career, or is that very new to you?

Jennie Teske: I did have, I did have some experience for, for managing. Um, but it's still weird. Like, um, like, like to manage a, a, a, an employee at a, at a corporate level is a little bit different than like handing your baby over. Like, um, I recently... Actually, to go to Cottage Foodiecon, I physically had to leave in order [00:38:00] to make the conference.

Um, but, but the market still went on that weekend. And so, um, my employee last year has now turned into two, and it's a mother-daughter team. Um, and I felt, I felt very weird because they were still getting everything ready in my house, in my bakery, and I was, I was physically leaving. And so I felt like, like it was a little bit like, um, leaving your kids with a babysitter for the first time.

Um, and it, it was just, it was, it was nice, but it, it, it was a little odd. It felt weird

David Crabill: Yeah, it's interesting because I, I know that you've recently expanded to two markets now, right? So you now on a regular basis are handing that over to them. Was that because of Cottage Foodiecon? Like, did that push you, um, and then you're like, "Well, n- now we can take another market," or was that something you had already planned?

Jennie Teske: We already planned it. Um, I, I, I was, I would like to try to do three markets a [00:39:00] week. Um, that was the original plan. There was gonna be a Friday night market and two Saturdays. Um, but I, I just can't, I just can't figure that out yet. So I, I keep pushing that out a little bit.

David Crabill: So, you know, it, it continues to grow, but, you know, you quit your job in end of 2024. You started to ramp up, and then I know you did like the market full-time in 2025, and you said that felt like a risk to you to expand to weekly markets. So why was that?

Jennie Teske: I didn't know i- if, if people came to us and then, and, and bought two weeks worth of stuff because they knew that they weren't going to see us next week, um, or was it more of like a, "Ooh, I better go this week because they're not going to be there next week," and then maybe they had plans the, the next week.

So I, I didn't know if people would still seek us [00:40:00] out even though we were there every week, and it was a consistent schedule

David Crabill: Did you s- find that your sales doubled because you were there every week, or was it less than that because of what you were saying? Maybe some people bought more in advance

Jennie Teske: It was a little, little less than double, but, but close

David Crabill: so you, you grew over the last year. I mean, has this been pretty much all farmers markets and then the Yak Shack, or have there been other ways that you have been selling?

Jennie Teske: in the beginning we did some craft shows, um, in the winter season. Um, they were successful, but it, it, it was just harder to schedule because, um, of holiday orders. 'Cause tho- those craft shows really kind of go around the holiday schedules. Um, and so for the baking schedule it was just, it was a little much to do, um, [00:41:00] all of it.

Um, we moved to, um, to a delivery system as well recently. So every Tuesday, um, we picked four suburbs, um, of the Twin Cities area that were at least an hour away from us. 'Cause we figured if you li- if you lived, like, half an hour, 40 minutes within our, our little bubble, um, you could probably come to us.

But if you're beyond that, we wanted to come to you. So it's, it's very regular. So, um, we have four cities that we go to. It's always, um, the same city each week of the month. Um, and we meet people e- we're back to meeting people in parking lots. And, um, uh, we wait for them, and they show up between 5:00 and 7:00 at night, and pass off their order

David Crabill: Now, are these people in the extended suburbs? Are they like [00:42:00] almost all people that are specifically looking for gluten-free product?

Jennie Teske: Yep

David Crabill: Yeah. So, um, how many of your customers would you say at the market are, like, really looking for gluten-free products versus those who just choose to buy yours?

Jennie Teske: I'd say we're probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 60/40, 70/30, um, the majority needing gluten-free

David Crabill: But there's still a lot there, right? That they don't, they don't have to buy from you, but they still do.

Jennie Teske: Yep

David Crabill: so what about pricing? 'Cause I, I'd imagine that, you know, you, you have a specialized product, gluten-free product, then you would naturally be charging a higher price.

Jennie Teske: when I price things out, I look at a number of factors, and it, and it could be, the ingredient cost, and then, how I feel our product [00:43:00] weighs up against other people. So I think we have a really good cinnamon roll.

So our cinnamon roll prices are a little bit higher than, than the market average, I think. Um, but I, I, I think actually what, what draws people in regardless, gluten-free or not, is the branding. Um, I think people just really think that we have a really nice market setup. Um, it's very professional. Um, we, we brand everything that we can.

Um, and so people are curious. Uh, a- and it's a fun, it's a fun logo. It's a, it's a fun name. Um, and so people come into the, the tent at the farmers market, and they're just kinda checking it out, and they're like, "Ooh, lemon bars. I love lemon bars. I'll try one."

David Crabill: yeah, you know, I, I really wanted to ask you about your branding because, you know, The Silly Yak, right? And then you have this yak logo. You know, it's a very fun brand and, and not necessarily something that I would [00:44:00] expect.

So how did you come up with that?

Jennie Teske: So the very beginning when Mark said I had to come up with a name, um, if we were going to sell, um, I was... I like puns. I'm, I'm, I'm a very punny person. Um, and so I was just like rolling it off my tongue of, of celiac and celiac, and what, what can I move that will go with celiac? And then it just kind of came out Silly Yak. And so that's where that came from. We have a friend who's a graphic designer, and she designed, the logo for us. We gave, we gave her kind of a little bit of a like, "Here's what we're looking for," and she came out with the rest

David Crabill: Interesting. You know, I've seen the celiac and I never made that connection

Jennie Teske: We have customers that come back, um, after quite a few years that will say the same thing of like, "Ah, now I just get it."

David Crabill: But you know what's really fascinating about that is that [00:45:00] even though on the surface it looks like the silly yak has absolutely nothing to do with your products and what you sell, it's a unique brand. It's a memorable brand. It's a fun brand, and it works, right?

Jennie Teske: Yeah, and,

and we really play it up too. So, um, you know, we have some products like the Yak Bites, and we have a monthly subscription that we call a Yak Pak. Um, we also, um, change the spelling on things. So the Yak Shak is, um, S-H-A-K. And so w- we really, um, we really utilize it in, in a lot of what we do

David Crabill: I just was kind of curious about that because, um, it hasn't seemed like you really needed to lean on the branding because your product itself is in such high demand.

So, um, I guess, what do you feel like [00:46:00] have you done with the branding that has helped your, your business grow?

Jennie Teske: we do a lot of promotional items. So we have magnets, and, um, pens, and, um, key chains, um, that we will either give away, um, at certain events or they come with. Um, like the Yak Pak every month you get to pick what branding item you want. Um, we also use it as a way of like, um, families walking by. Um, you know, we, we, we say hi to everybody at the market and, and they might have little kiddos, and we're like, "Oh, would you like a sticker?"

And, and so we will hand them, um, one of our, uh, little yak head stickers. Um, so I, I... We use it to engage people. Um, we also use it, uh, to, uh, just identify ourselves and to make [00:47:00] it look a little bit more professional. Like, we have a banner on our tent. We ha- Like, on the, the top of the canopy tent. Uh, we also have the, you know, the standard banner that you have in the, the back or on the side of your, of your canopy tent.

Um,

David Crabill: One thing I did notice, though, even though you don't necessarily have fancy packaging, all of your packaging lets people see the product. Like, you use windows, you know, everything's clear to some degree, almost everything, right? And that seems very intentional, like you want the customer to see the product before buying it

Jennie Teske: Yes. Yes. And I would much rather, um, spend money on quality ingredients, um, than, than pretty cookie backers or, or pretty, pretty packaging. Um, the other thing I try to do is standardize. Like, um, [00:48:00] you know, e- everything, almost everything is like that craft brown color. Um, I don't, I don't want it too cutesy 'cause I, I think we already have that on the logo.

I don't, I don't think we need, you know, o- other cutesy packaging

David Crabill: Well, it's clearly working very well and, you know, you're, you're growing a lot. So like, what are your numbers? Uh, like what, what are your numbers looking like this year? What were they last year?

Jennie Teske: Uh, last year we were about 70,000 in sales. Um, this year we're projected to be over 100

David Crabill: Wow. So that's interesting, right? Because now we are looking at the limitations of the cottage food law

Jennie Teske: Uh, yes, but in Minnesota, um, you, as long as you live in the same household, you can register two people. Um, and my... A- a- and it, and [00:49:00] it's not just a gimmick for us. Like, like, my husband legitimately, he bakes bread. Um, he packages the, the pancake mix. He does the, um, pizzas. Like, he's actively involved in it.

It's, it's not just a way to cheat the numbers. but

David Crabill: And I, I will confirm, Mike, from watching your social posts, I was like, "Wow, I should have had Mark on too," 'cause he's clearly very involved in the business.

Jennie Teske: He is. Yes, he is. Um, so, so that enables us to double our sales cap

David Crabill: Okay. Well, even still, I mean, with you growing to over \$100,000 this year, like that's a lot of product to be doing from a home kitchen. Do you feel like it's sustainable, or you, like, have an eye towards setting up a commercial space on your property or, like, you know, finding a commercial space? Like, is that something you've considered?

Jennie Teske: It's something that we're considering. Um, I think we still have some, some growth and opportunity [00:50:00] from our house. Um, bringing on a commercial kitchen or, uh, a brick and mortar has a lot of risks, and as you've probably noticed, I'm not a huge risk taker. Um, so something would have to like fall in my lap or drastically happen to, to make me go, "Ooh, yeah, I think it's time."

But you know, five years, seven years down the road, maybe

David Crabill: Yeah, I mean, in five years, I don't know. I feel like you're growing a little too fast. I feel like you're gonna need to think about, like, building out something on your property at the very least. But, um, as you're growing, like, how have you changed your kitchen space? I know you said you moved downstairs.

Like, like, how many ovens do you have? Like, how many freezers do you have? How many c- fridge- like, you know, this is a lot of product to be doing from a, a house

Jennie Teske: It is. Um, right now we have three ovens in the lower level. Uh, the, we have a double oven in our, in our home [00:51:00] kitchen upstairs. Um, we have a freezer now in the Yak Shack, um, so that, that is for the pretzels and the pizza crust, 'cause we sell both of those items, um, frozen so that the, the quality and the freshness are, are locked in.

Um, we also have a freezer sale w- usually once a month, sometimes it's a little bit more, um, where we discount the, the loaves of bread that didn't sell at a market. Um, and so we used to haul out a cooler every ti- every month or every time, um, the freezer sale happened, so now we have that in the freezer.

But Monday through Thursday, that freezer is available for me to use. Um, but in addition to that, I think we have two more full freezers in the garage and t- two refrigerators as well

David Crabill: what have been the challenges of growing this business? You know, I know there's been a lot of growth. I know there's been a lot of demand. But I would [00:52:00] imagine, like any business, especially one that is eyeballing six figures this year, there have been some growing pains over time. So what do you feel like has been most challenging as you've grown this business?

Jennie Teske: Trying to figure out the balance of, of still taking a day off, um, without having something still hanging over or, or even just taking like a full day off. Um, i- it's also, there's also some space limitations, um, and, and cashflow. Like there's, there are a lot of things I wanna do. There's a lot of things that I want, um, to be able to buy that would, that would make production a little bit more, um, streamlined.

Um, but I don't have the, the funds in the bank for that just yet. So kind of trying to make do with what we have and then add things as, um, as we've planned for it or, or it's ne- [00:53:00] necessary

David Crabill: Well, I mean, what, what would you like to do? Like, what would you like to see it become over the next year or more?

Jennie Teske: We have plans to get a, a 20-quart mixer. Um, so right now I'm just using the, the 7-quart KitchenAid. Um, so we, we have plans to, to get a, a bigger mixer. Um, uh, I s- I would like another double oven downstairs, so that could bring us either to five or, um, to four, depending on how we, we mark that out. Um, we were very blessed this year to have, uh, been able to participate in a county grant.

Um, so we applied for the grant and we, we received it, and that helped us, uh, put electricity out to the Yak Shack. Um, so now it's, it's fully electrical, self, self-contained, um, out there, so that, that was [00:54:00] helpful. That was on our... That's been on our list for w- uh, since we've, since we acquired it

David Crabill: What was the the process like of getting the grant?

Jennie Teske: We had to meet with the, um, SBDC. So we have one in our town. Um, it's the, the local chapter. Um, and we had to show us- show them our business plan, um, write a, a plan about what, what... how much of the funds we were going to use, um, and what exactly we were going to use them for, and then we have to, um, check in with them quarterly for the next two years just to see, um, if we're on track with financial projections, uh, just double-checking that the work has been done, uh, receipts were, um, turned in

David Crabill: but this is not a loan, right? Like this, you don't have to pay it back? Now, now it's, it's amazing to hear that you're still using [00:55:00] a standard KitchenAid mixer because, like, somebody's doing, what, \$10,000 of revenue a month. Uh, I think most people would have jumped to a larger mixer by this point.

So you clearly are, are making do and sort of pushing the limits with what's possible

Jennie Teske: Yeah. I, I, I'm, I'm not a spender. Um, uh, it's, it's just, it's hard for me to pull the trigger on some things, especially in, you know, eight, \$900 mixer when what I've got is working just fine.

David Crabill: you at least have more than one mixer or you have

Jennie Teske: Yeah.

Yeah, we have, uh, I think we have three, but maybe only two work

David Crabill: Okay. It, yeah, two even still is, that's a lot of product to be doing. So, well, what about in, like, the next five years? You know, where, where would you like to grow this business over the next few years?

Jennie Teske: I would really like, [00:56:00] uh, to be able to keep my husband home as well. Um, we had a little taste of that last year, um, and it, it was very nice. And so I, I would like to get the sales up to where this could be a full-time income for, for the both of us

David Crabill: Have you, over the past few years, had any point where you thought, "Oh, this is, this is just too much. Like I, I, I wanna quit"?

Jennie Teske: Uh, like every month. Yeah.

David Crabill: Okay, so what's kept you going?

Jennie Teske: the demand. Um, bringing, bringing things to the, to the market. Um, used to have a really terrible schedule before, before we went to a farmer's market, and we were up until 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, and then having to leave the house by 6:37 the next morning. Um, but when we make it to the market and, [00:57:00] and seeing that our product sells and how well it sells, and the relationships that we're, we've made with customers who have turned clients who have turned friends, um, it just fills the cup back up

David Crabill: Well, if you think about a new cottage baker, somebody who's, who's just starting out today, what advice would you give them?

Jennie Teske: Most definitely that you are I- a legitimate business, and there are programs and, um, help available for you. Um, join your chamber of commerce. Um, connect with SBDC. There's SCORE mentors. Uh, just because you work from your home and just because you're a cottage baker does not make you a, a lesser business than somebody who has a brick-and-mortar o- on Main Street

David Crabill: Are there any other things that you feel like new entrepreneurs that make a mistake or, [00:58:00] or things that they should know as they're starting their cottage food journey?

Jennie Teske: I think it's important to network, um, to, to get out in front of other business owners. Um, I meet every week with, with a small group of, of, um, other women business owners in, in our town. Um, and regardless of what kind of business, you all face the same challenges of like h- how do I, how do I engage my customers?

How do I keep my social media fresh? How do I get people to walk in the door? But my door might be my bakery stand or a market. And so really having a group of people that you can, um, just bounce ideas off of a- and share common struggles, I think is, is very helpful

David Crabill: How do you think this business has grown you as a person?

Jennie Teske: it's, I think it's opened my eyes [00:59:00] to what entrepreneurship can be. Like, I was very against it. I, I, I didn't want... You know, I, I grew up in a traditional 9:00 to 5:00 household where we all drove, you know, 40 minutes into downtown, um, to work, and it, and if it, if that's not what you were doing, then, eh, it might be a little weird or odd.

Uh, and so it, like, this whole experience has, has opened my eyes to a whole other side of, of business and, and how you can have the flexibility. And, um, it's, it's really on your shoulders. Like, what, what you wanna do and how far you wanna take something is, is mostly up to you

David Crabill: Awesome. Well, thank you so much, Jennie. Now, if someone would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

Jennie Teske: Our website is thesillyakmn.com, uh, and our socials are the same. Um, any messages or emails, thesillyakmn@gmail.com is the, uh, email to reach us at.

David Crabill: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today

Jennie Teske: Thanks, David. It was nice to see you again

David Crabill: That wraps up another episode of The Forrager Podcast.

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Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.