



Bridport Creamery, Bridport, VT
Nicky Foster & Julie Danyew
www.BridportCreamery.com

2011, 2012: Business Technical Assistance
2013, 2014: Loan Recipients

Loan History

Bridport Creamery is a new business founded by two women who share a dedication to hard work, local food systems, and farm viability. They were introduced by their chiropractor when they had — so to speak — back-to-back appointments. Each had experience in dairy farming and cheese making; they both saw potential for pursuing their dreams of self-employment and increased financial security through a shared business.

Nicky grew up on Iroquois Acres Farm and, with her siblings, developed a herd of award-winning Brown Swiss cows. In recent years, she studied at the Vermont Institute of Artisan Cheese. Julie has owned Danz Ahn Farm, a goat dairy, since 2007. She had several years of cheesemaking experience with Danz Ahn goat's milk feta and at other small-scale operations. Together, the two women had a network of extended family, supportive neighbors, and contacts in the agricultural community that could assist them in forming a new business.

They approached The Carrot Project in the early stages of planning their business. Over a period of two years, technical assistance from The Carrot Project helped Nicky and Julie to define the business structure, and, when they were ready, refine the size, purpose, and timing of the loan application. Vermont Community Loan Fund, The Carrot Project's lending partner, approved the loan. Nicky and Julie started to produce cheese in their newly constructed facility, Bridport Creamery, in September 2013.

Overview of Outcomes

Julie and Nicky have used funds from The Carrot Project:

- to purchase crucial equipment: a 265-gallon stainless steel pasteurizing vat, and cheese molds
- as operating capital for the business in the start-up phase

"We were so relieved to find The Carrot Project where we were able to get a loan we could afford," they say. "We wouldn't be making cheese if it weren't for The Carrot Project. We wouldn't have gotten off the ground."

Direct Loan Outcomes

Bridport Creamery is a blended business: two cheesemaking owners and two types of milk that can be used raw or pasteurized to make cheese that is aged or sold fresh. Each option for handling the milk has implications for the flavor of the cheese and its maturity date. It is significant for a small start-up creamery to have such a range of options. Bridport Creamery's financial success depends, in part, on the owners' ability to make a variety of cheeses to achieve a sustainable cash flow.

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Farm Snapshot

Bridport Creamery is a woman-owned business that makes cheese from locally-sourced cow and goat milk. The Creamery is located at Iroquois Acres Farm, a conventional dairy farm owned by relatives of one of the Creamery's co-owners.

Affordable, familiar cheeses are Bridport Creamery's foundation. Their fresh cheese curds and feta won a gold and a silver medal, respectively, at the 2014 Eastern States Exposition.

Entrepreneur's Philosophy

"We didn't romanticize about it," Nicky says. "Our business plan is to keep it simple."

Innovation

Cooperation between two entrepreneurs has created a viable business that neither could have pursued alone.

The loan was a crucial piece of the puzzle in this start-up business. Nicky and Julie used the loan funds to buy equipment to increase production volume and variety. The large pasteurizing vat allowed them to tap in to an incredible resource: an almost unlimited supply of cow's milk produced on location at Iroquois Acres Farm. The pasteurizing vat expanded the types of cheeses that Bridport Creamery could produce, as milk that has been pasteurized can be used in cheese that is sold fresh (immediately ready for sale) or aged (for flavor).

Niche in the Vermont Cheese Market

Vermont has long been known as a dairy state. In the past two decades, Vermont has emerged as a center for artisan cheese. Many organizations, including the Vermont Cheese Council, Vermont Farm-to-Plate Initiative, and the "Buy Local" initiative of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, support the growth of this value-added industry. These factors contributed to a favorable marketing environment for Bridport Creamery, but at the same time, offered potential challenges of competition and market saturation.

Nicky and Julie saw an opportunity to create a viable business using Julie's feta cheese as the cornerstone. However, feta is a raw milk cheese and must be aged at least 60 days prior to sale. This creates a delay between the time the cheese is produced and when the cheesemaker is paid.

To complement that inherent delay, Nicky and Julie added cheese curd, a versatile fresh cheese, to their product line. Made from pasteurized milk, cheese curd is ready for market without aging. As Julie explains, "We banked on the curds to give us a steady cash flow."

The Creamery operates at a sweet spot that balances fresh and aged cheese with production and market demand. "Curds are affordable. It's amazing the number we sell through mom and pop stores," says Nicky. Additional markets include restaurants, farmers markets, and online sales. To further diversify Bridport Creamery's offerings, Nicky and Julie are developing a new line of aged cow and goat milk cheeses called Champlain Valley Tommes.

Closing Thoughts

Agro-tourism is a welcomed but unexpected outcome of Bridport Creamery's first year in production. In one location, tourists can see the intimate connection between the cows at Iroquois Acres and the cheese at Bridport Creamery. The Vermont Cheese Council promotes the Creamery through its Vermont Cheese Trail Map, and a local inn and a nearby apple orchard recommend the Creamery to their visitors.

"We surprise people," Julie says. "But we weren't surprised. We knew that once we had a pasteurizing vat, we could make cheese and we could make money." "We are paying our bills and ourselves a little," says Nicky. "We have a basic concept and we know we can expand the business."