

SCALING LOCAL FOOD BUSINESSES



Bold Spoon Creamery

Increasing cold storage and distribution to unlock wholesale markets

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BOLD SPOON CREAMERY INCREASES COLD STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION TO UNLOCK WHOLESALE MARKETS

Founded by Rachel Burns in 2019, Bold Spoon Creamery began with a red wagon stocked with dry ice and ice cream and made its first sale on May 2, 2020.

Today, Bold Spoon Creamery crafts premium small-batch ice cream in a commercial kitchen on Rachel's farm in Park Hills, Missouri. "The fact that we make it on our farm really helps us to align with our North Star [a clear, guiding idea], which is being a farm-to-bowl brand," Rachel said. The creamery sets itself apart by using natural ingredients and avoiding artificial colors and flavors. Many of the fruits and herbs featured in its handcrafted flavors are grown on the farm.

Bold Spoon Creamery began with a single commercial ice cream maker, a batch freezer, and space in a rented commercial kitchen. Over its first five years, the business experienced significant growth, leading to the purchase of a farm, development of an on-farm processing facility, and, ultimately, new equipment supported by a Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) equipment-only grant. The expansion enabled Bold Spoon Creamery to better serve the wholesale market.

Written by

Mallory Rahe, Associate Extension Professor
TaylorAnn Washburn, Extension Specialist



BUSINESS SNAPSHOT

Bold Spoon Creamery
COMPANY

Rachel Burns
FOUNDER

Park Hills, Missouri
LOCATION

May 2, 2020
LAUNCH DATE

Small-batch premium ice cream
PRODUCT LINE

Entertainment venues, colleges/universities, hotels, grocery stores, St. Louis Lambert International Airport

MARKETS

Pivoting when the market changed

Bold Spoon Creamery originally planned to serve restaurants, but widespread closures during the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated that market. Rachel had a critical decision to make. Rather than waiting for conditions to improve, Rachel pivoted to direct-to-consumer sales, going door-to-door offering contactless ordering and delivery.

“I decided that I needed to just start this thing because I thought it would be easier to pivot in motion than to pivot standing still.”

The Tower Grove Farmers Market in St. Louis became the company’s second market channel and remains part of its strategy as they have scaled. Rachel credits the market with helping generate the sales needed to reach the company’s next phase of growth while providing direct customer access, allowing her to gather feedback, test pricing strategies, and gauge demand. Early on, it also connected Bold Spoon Creamery with local farms that supplied fresh fruit, strengthening the farm-to-bowl identity that continues to define the brand.

Building the foundation for growth

Bold Spoon Creamery reached a major milestone in January 2021 with the purchase of a 57-acre farm in St. Francois County, Missouri. The company converted an existing building into an on-farm processing facility, which began operating in May 2021. “That was a pivotal moment and helped me realize there are bigger possibilities,” Rachel said.

The facility expanded production capacity, enabled on-site processing of farm-grown ingredients, and created a vertically integrated operation that improved oversight and streamlined food safety compliance.

Driven by her 20 years of experience in institutional investments, Rachel focused on serving large institutions rather than pursuing the traditional ice cream shop model. With increased production capacity, she began pursuing new wholesale market opportunities.

Another breakthrough came when Rachel learned how food service management companies (FSMCs) connect food producers with large institutional customers.

MINT TO BE: FROM HOBBY TO LIVELIHOOD

Bold Spoon Creamery began as a hobby. “I had too much mint, and I was trying to use it up,” Rachel said. As she experimented with recipes, she realized the idea could become more than a hobby. “I was thinking about it an absurd amount of time and told my husband, ‘I need to either make this a business or stop,’” she recalled. With the benefit of hindsight, Rachel admits her early estimates were overly optimistic. “The expenses grossly underestimated; the effort grossly underestimated.”

Despite those miscalculations, she built Bold Spoon into a thriving business that employs five full-time and 12 part-time team members.



Bold Spoon’s Garden Mint, the flavor that launched the company.

Through these partnerships, Bold Spoon Creamery entered wholesale markets including stadiums, outdoor entertainment venues, and airport concessions. Today, the company also serves restaurants, grocery stores, universities, hospitals, and hotels.

RFSI investment unlocks scale

As Bold Spoon Creamery expanded into wholesale, bottlenecks emerged in cold storage and distribution operations. The company relied on a walk-in freezer and a delivery truck without a lift gate, requiring employees to manually move small quantities of ice cream. As wholesale orders grew, the process created safety concerns and operational inefficiencies.

At the same time Bold Spoon Creamery recognized its capacity challenges, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service launched the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) program, providing a potential opportunity to address the company's infrastructure needs.

The RFSI program supported investments that strengthen local food systems and enhance the resilience of the middle supply chain while creating new revenue opportunities for producers. Administered through state departments of agriculture, the program targets infrastructure gaps identified at the state level. Missouri had identified insufficient cold storage capacity as a significant barrier to the growth and distribution of locally produced food, directly supporting Bold Spoon Creamery's need to expand its cold storage capabilities.

“RFSI was massively pivotal. Receiving the equipment-only grant allowed us to make three substantial investments that would not have been possible otherwise.”



Preparing to fill ice cream makers at Bold Spoon Creamery.

Bold Spoon Creamery received a \$96,285 RFSI Equipment-Only Grant that funded a pallet-sized freezer, a liftgate for its delivery vehicle, and a temperature monitoring system. Together, the investments expanded storage capacity, improved delivery efficiency, and strengthened quality monitoring capabilities, allowing Bold Spoon Creamery to expand its wholesale accounts.

Three investments, one system

The palletized freezer increased the company's capacity to package and store product for large-scale orders. Upgrading the business's cold storage from a traditional walk-in freezer to palletized cold storage was a major undertaking. While the grant covered the cost of the freezer itself, Bold Spoon Creamery faced substantial installation expenses. The company had to cut an opening in the existing processing facility, pour a new concrete floor, build a loading dock, upgrade electrical service, and connect the new equipment. These improvements added approximately \$70,000 to the project cost.

The addition of the electric liftgate made it possible to move pallets efficiently between the delivery truck and customers' loading

docks, improving both safety and productivity. “Having the lift gate is amazing because, one, it’s for the safety of the driver, and that’s a big deal, but it’s also about efficient execution,” Rachel said. “Now we’re delivering to universities and stadiums, and we’re moving multiple pallets, or the equivalent thereof, at a time.”

The temperature-monitoring system automates food-safety compliance logging, continuously monitors refrigerated inventory, and alerts staff

when temperatures rise above acceptable levels. It also allows Bold Spoon Creamery to demonstrate cold-chain integrity to customers and protect the business from product loss caused by equipment failure.

“The temperature monitoring system is unbelievable. We have sensors in all our walk-in freezers and coolers, and we can monitor everything through an app on our phones,” Rachel said about the new technology.



The outside of the newly installed freezer, with loading dock connected to the rear of the existing creamery.

Each investment addressed a different operational need, but together they created an integrated cold-storage and distribution system.

The upgrades expanded capacity, improved food-safety monitoring, and increased delivery efficiency, allowing the company to serve larger customers and manage higher-volume orders with confidence.

“As I think about scaling, those three things were linked together. What would have been the purpose of getting a massive walk-in freezer with palletized storage if I had no way of monitoring and verifying the temperature? And what is the point of having the ability to store pallets and load them onto our delivery truck if I have no efficient way to get them off? Each piece supports the others.”



A pallet of product in the new freezer waits to be wrapped and shipped.



The liftgate on the delivery truck makes loading and unloading products easier and more efficient.

With the new equipment in place, Bold Spoon Creamery was able to confidently take on additional large-scale wholesale accounts, add four employees, train four team members on the new equipment and food safety procedures, and establish 15 new market outlets.

UNLOCKING WHOLESALE SUCCESS

Bold Spoon Creamery's entry into food service management company (FSMC) contracting began in 2023, when the Levy Group asked Rachel to sell her ice cream at CityPark, the new St. Louis City SC soccer stadium. The stadium was launching the City Flavor program to showcase local restaurants and food producers.

Entering larger wholesale and food service contracts required investments in operations and additional certifications. Bold Spoon Creamery's focus on clean-label products positioned the company to meet growing demand for locally-made, healthier, and more distinctive food choices.

That positioning made the company a natural fit for Avotola's "Eat Well. Travel Further." initiative, which aims to expand the range and nutritional value of food offerings at transit stations. Third-party food safety audits were another important step toward larger wholesale agreements. Although expensive and not required by every customer, the audits helped strengthen the company's operations. "A small business might think, 'That's too onerous for us,' or 'Is it really worth the effort for one client?'" Rachel said. "I didn't do it for one client; I did it for all the future clients [that require a third-party audit]."

Entering these markets also meant overcoming buyer hesitation after previous experiences with small producers who struggled to meet volume, delivery, and customer service expectations. "They had been burned by small producers before," Rachel said. "Because they [small businesses] didn't understand the volume needed, they didn't have the appropriate delivery mechanism, they didn't have client service practices in place and so on. Frankly, I was often fighting someone else's issues. I didn't do those things, but I was also small. Once you unlock one [wholesale account] and prove you could get it, then that is a big deal."

2023 MARKET CHANNEL: STADIUM CONCESSIONS

Unlock Moment: Invitation from Levy to sell at CityPark as part of City Flavor Program

Investments: Expansion of stadium and events team; branded delivery truck; large production equipment.

Benefits: High customer traffic; strong brand visibility; opportunities to develop themed flavors.

2025 MARKET CHANNEL: ENTERTAINMENT VENUE

Unlock Moment: Demonstrated ability to fulfill and deliver large orders efficiently.

Investments: Palletized storage; distribution capabilities.

Benefits: Revenue growth through single, high-volume distribution point.

2026 MARKET CHANNEL: TRANSIT STATIONS

Unlock Moment: Partnership with Avotola and completion of third-party food safety audit.

Investments: Third-party food safety audit; branded retail freezer.

Benefits: Expanded market access; improved manufacturing and quality assurance processes.

Scaling the business and team

Like earlier milestones — including the pandemic pivot, on-farm processing, and the first third-party food service contract — the RFSI investments represent a pivotal moment in the company's growth. When asked about how these investments have changed her outlook on the company's future, Rachel said, "The future is more possible now." Her vision includes further expansion into wholesale accounts across Missouri and into other states.

That growth also reshaped Rachel's role as a business owner and leader. While she once handled nearly every aspect of the business, she now focuses her efforts where she can create the most value, particularly customer acquisition and business development.

Although she remains heavily involved in the day-to-day operations, she holds herself accountable for identifying and developing new accounts as sales manager. She also oversees finances while setting goals and milestones until the business can hire dedicated staff, remaining heavily involved in day-to-day operations.

Reflecting on her role as Bold Spoon Creamery's CFO, Rachel explained: "I do

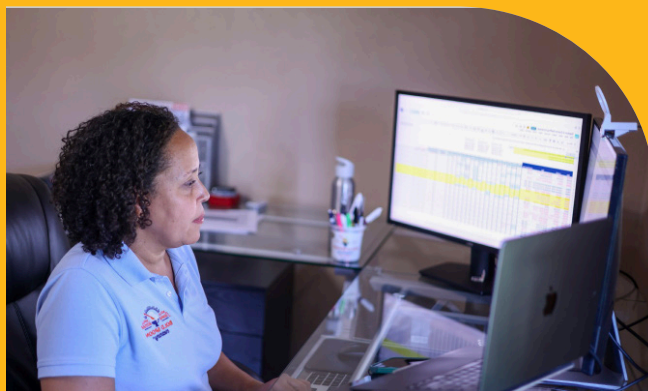
these check-ins with myself, which might sound a little bit crazy, but I say, okay, in the role of the CFO, how did you do over the course of this week? Did you do a good job smoothing out cash flow?"

Like many small business owners, Rachel must balance multiple responsibilities while ensuring no critical area of the business is neglected. "It's really easy to get so busy in one way that you're like, 'I have not pursued new clients in a month', which is way too long," she said.

Building the team around strengths

As Bold Spoon Creamery has grown, Rachel has intentionally reshaped positions to align employees' responsibilities with their strengths and interests. She regularly discusses employees' strengths, career goals, and areas where they can contribute most effectively. Rachel explained, "As we scale, to the extent that I can align people's interests and natural talents with what they're doing, I think it's better for everybody."

For Rachel, growth is also about creating quality jobs. Increased sales have made it possible to offer meaningful benefits such as PTO and health insurance, along with competitive wages.



Clearly defined standard operating procedures in the creamery allow Rachel to focus on business development.

"The thing that I'm most excited about is adding to our team and providing opportunities to grow. I want to make sure as we grow, that to the extent I can, that jobs align with natural talent and interest. ... I think that the more that we grow, that just makes it possible for me to do that."



ADVICE TO ASPIRING OR EXPANDING FOOD AND FARM ENTREPRENEURS

Understand your financials

Rachel's background in institutional investment consulting shaped her approach to maintaining Bold Spoon Creamery's financial health. For entrepreneurs considering growth, she emphasizes the importance of being financially prepared, understanding cash flow and forecasting future needs.

Many of her wholesale accounts operate on fixed 60-day payment terms, a sharp contrast to the immediate revenue generated through farmers markets. As businesses take on larger wholesale accounts, they often have less control over payment terms and must plan for the resulting gap in production costs and incoming revenue.

“As you're thinking about scaling, you have to be critically aware of cash flow and forecast your cash flow needs... A good business could be wrecked by bad cash flow.”

Understanding production costs and validating

profitable market demand should come before major investments in growth. Once market viability is established, businesses can manage financial risk through strategies such as carefully timing investments, using operating loans, and developing a mix of customers and market channels.

She strongly recommends that business owners who lack financial expertise seek guidance from an accountant, advisor, or mentor.

Don't be afraid to invest in branding and marketing

New and emerging farm and food businesses often prioritize keeping costs low, making marketing a difficult investment to justify when its return can be difficult to measure directly.

Rachel found that investing in professional photography dramatically improved her brand's presentation, and the investment has paid for itself many times over as she has built brand awareness and established customer expectations across every market channel the business has entered.

The company's branding efforts began with professional signage and farmers market tents and expanded to branded, FDA-compliant packaging, wrapped delivery trucks, and, most recently, a wrapped chest freezer at the St. Louis airport.

Reflecting on that most recent investment, Rachel said: "I paid a lot of money to get [a branded wrap] designed and printed because I knew thousands of people were going to walk by. Could I have just got a plain white freezer and put up a poster? I could have. But that would have been an outrageous loss."

Rachel encourages other farm and food businesses to view marketing as a necessary investment rather than an expense. Changing your mindset by no longer thinking of marketing as an expense and instead viewing it as an investment will change how you evaluate its value.

Have your North Star and know your customer

Bold Spoon Creamery identifies its target customer through its name and brand positioning, appealing to consumers who value high-quality, clean ingredients and distinctive flavors. The brand's name emerged during early product testing when a friend remarked, "Your flavors are so bold. I love them." That simple observation continues to influence the approach to flavor development.

As Rachel explained, "We can't have the name Bold Spoon and then come out with Rocky Road ice cream. That's outrageous, right? It forces us to stay in our lane. Which to me is very important as a business." Having a clearly identified North Star helps guide business decisions, investments, and market opportunities.

Rachel notes the importance of having a strong set of guiding principles, recognizing that not every opportunity is a good



Bold Spoon Creamery's branded delivery truck and freezer at the St. Louis airport market the business as it expands delivery routes and appeals to visitors in high-traffic areas.



opportunity. She sees the idea of "staying in your lane" as a framework for growth rather than a limitation.

"Staying in your lane doesn't mean that you don't explore or that you don't grow in new ways. But staying in your lane means this is nonnegotiable who we are."

She cautions small businesses against trying to serve everyone: "If everyone is your customer, no one will be."

Missouri offers resources for value-added businesses

Rachel took a proactive approach to growing Bold Spoon Creamery, seeking education, technical assistance, and industry connections to navigate the learning curve of being both a beginning farmer and new business owner.

Through the Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA), she learned about buyer missions and attended state-supported trade shows that helped her connect with buyers and explore new markets. Working with MDA has helped Rachel view business growth and the potential of export markets for a small company in a new way.

She also worked with University of Missouri Extension's Missouri Agriculture, Food and Forestry Innovation Center, participating in events and receiving technical assistance from value-added business support staff through the RFSI program. She has also received guidance from MU Extension's regional commercial horticulture and agronomy specialists.

Rachel credits these resources with significantly changing the trajectory of her business: "As a growing food business,

a ... trajectory-changing experience was learning about all of the vast resources of MU Extension, MDA and the RFSI program."

Identifying valuable support often requires business owners to step back, assess their needs, and actively seek resources that can help them grow. Rachel said this process takes time and persistence, including conducting online research, asking questions, and following up on potential opportunities. She also found value in connecting with other business leaders through a CEO Roundtable in St. Louis hosted by the Missouri Small Business Development Centers. "The amount of effort that's put into helping the Missouri economy thrive is really impressive," Rachel said.

Rachel encourages other entrepreneurs to explore Extension and its partner organizations. Extension programs have served communities since the passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, connecting people to land-grant universities with education and applied research.

Today, MU Extension provides access to university research and knowledge in all 114 Missouri counties and the City of St. Louis. The availability of grants, programming and



Rachel shares insights into business development and operations with MU Extension's Mallory Rahe.

"Initially when I thought Extension, my thought was mostly farmers, and obviously that's a role too. But it's much broader than that. I think having that experience now has been great."

personnel support is always changing, but business owners who devote time to working on their business can access a wide range of educational opportunities and business-building resources.

What's next for Bold Spoon Creamery?

Rachel and her team have three goals for future scaling:

- Expand on-farm fruit production by planting more trees and experimenting with growing figs.
- Explore export opportunities through the Port of St. Louis.
- Develop regional markets around anchor institutional buyers beyond the St. Louis area.

Bold Spoon Creamery continues to pursue new markets, and is already exploring export opportunities with support from MDA's international export team.

Rachel's proximity to the Port of St. Louis creates an opportunity to reach wholesale customers overseas more cost-effectively than shipping products by truck across the United States. "I would suggest to other small businesses, don't count exports out as an option," she advises. Like entering any new



Rachel and her team prepare product in her on-farm processing facility in Park Hills.

market, exporting comes with a learning curve and will require additional investments in packaging modifications and regulatory compliance.

Rachel encourages other food and farm entrepreneurs with a simple statement: "Take your shot. You never know." In just six years, Bold Spoon Creamery grew from delivering premium small-batch ice cream to individual customers in a red wagon to shipping large wholesale orders in its own branded truck.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Learn more about Bold Spoon Creamery](http://boldspooncreamery.com) (boldspooncreamery.com)

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