



Businesses beginning at home

About 5 percent of Mainers participate

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

In a tiny urban apartment, dark and stormy bonbons are made in small batches. In a sparkly new home by the sea, a woman plunges up to her elbows in colorful meringues. Over in Damariscotta, bars of goat milk soap cool in a basement root cellar.

What do these diverse businesses have in common? They are all home-based.

Yankee ingenuity takes many forms. As Maine's robust DIY economy soars, homeowners are supplementing their income with ideas incubated, executed, packaged and shipped all from around the kitchen sink.

"Home-based businesses are on the rise in Maine, especially in the cultural [and] food sector," said Jim McConnon, a professor of economics at the University of Maine. He estimates that 69,000 businesses, mostly single proprietor, are home-based. That equates to just more than 5 percent of the state's population.

"In Maine there is no stigma for staying at home and working in your pajama pants," said Amanda Nelson, CEO and head soapmaker at Long Winter Soap Co. The company that started in a yurt in 2007 is now headquartered in the basement of her 1931 house in Damariscotta. In root cellars and throughout the house, Nelson and her partner Lucas McNelly and two children balance life, success and work.

In the run-up to the holidays, soaps and perfumes in scents such as barista and absinthe cover every surface.

"There is no separation. I have piles of stuff in closets. There are worse things that could take over your house," said Nelson, who sells her handcrafted products in shops up and down the coast and worldwide online.

Lurking behind closed doors, in houses of all descriptions — big, small, new, old — your neighbors are busy.

The state's food revolution that's going full throttle is also propelling a whole range of domestic businesses.

"It's an easy process," said Beth Calder, a food science specialist at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, regarding the rules for launching an edible cottage business. Depending on the product (low-risk, nonhazardous food that isn't canned or refrigerated) an inspection from the state's Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is the chief hurdle.

The state receives a "steady flow" of applications for food-based home businesses year after year. With no signs of stopping, "we anticipate even more interest," said state department spokesperson John Bott, adding that dairy and artisan cheese makers lead the pack.

When full-time mom Anne Taylor decided to take her gourmet macarons to market, she didn't look for a commercial facility. The bright kitchen in her passive solar home was the perfect launch pad for Morsels by Anne.

"For me it's very Maine," she said of her meringue-filled cook-
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ABOUT A BARN



ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN

The Washington General Store opened six months ago in the three-story former lumber barn that dominates the heart of town. "It really is the center of the village," co-owner Sean Donaghy said. "And when we painted it red, it got bigger." Donaghy (below) shows off the open kitchen and the cheddar cheese wheel, which have been a hit at the store. The side of the counter is made of salvaged exterior barn boards.

The heart of the village

New store takes root in old barn

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

When Sean Donaghy was gutting the ground floor of the three-story, gambrel-style barn he and his wife, Amy, bought two years ago, he had the kind of eureka moment that every renovator dreams of having.

They had big plans to turn the massive, 1930s-era lumber barn into the new Washington General Store, but didn't have a big budget to match. The Donaghy's figured they'd have to spend a lot of capital on fixing problems such as the exterior vinyl siding and the ugly interior drop ceilings that camouflaged whatever lay underneath. But when Sean Donaghy ripped into the vinyl siding and tore down the drop ceiling, he found the additions obscured something beautiful.

"I couldn't believe it," he said of finding diagonal bead board on the ceiling and Douglas fir tongue-in-groove siding on the outside of the 9,000-square-foot structure. "Why did they cover it up? I guess, like putting a shag carpet on an oak floor, it was just the style."

But as styles, thankfully, have changed, so have the fortunes of the barn. The solid structure originally supported floors filled with heavy stacks of lumber milled on nearby Washington Pond. More recently, the barn served as Luce's Bargain Shop, filled with trash, treasures and everything in between.

When the Great Recession hit Washington, a community of about 1,500 people, it took a toll on local businesses, according to Donaghy. When the couple moved there 13 years ago, there was an ice cream shop, a used bookstore, a market, an art gallery and the bargain barn.

"It felt like a town — like a place where you'd like to live," Donaghy said.

But all those businesses have closed. By the time the barn was put on the auction block two years ago, the couple had discussed whether they should move somewhere livelier to raise their four kids.

Instead, they decided to do something about it. When the barn didn't sell at auction, they purchased it and spent a year and a half slowly turning it back into something beautiful. They



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installed windows to let the light in and laid wide wooden floorboards over the original uneven cement. They also searched for ways to incorporate elements of the original lumber barn, which is why the varnished bar by the new front windows is made of boards they found in the third-floor lumber drying room. And the pale blue sliding barn door that separates the new hardware section from the rest of the store was salvaged from the rest of the building.

"People think we did some amazing distress work," Donaghy said. "All I did was vacuum it."

As for the general store itself, the couple wanted to create a clean, welcoming space with a kitchen that serves a great piece of pizza or sandwich. They wanted the employees to be friendly, the coffee to be fresh, the beer section to be impressive and the neighbors to feel welcome.

"We really wanted to be that heart of the village," Amy Donaghy said. "People are really happy we're here. It feels good."

The Washington General Store at 7 Waldoboro Road, Washington, is open 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday-Saturday and 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday. For information, call 845-2007.

Winter farmers markets expand

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

Frost may be glittering in the grass, but that doesn't mean you can't eat fresh and healthy during the coldest months of the year. And you can support your local grower, too.

Once a rarity in towns such as Brunswick and Saco, winter farmers markets are taking root and flourishing from coast to county.

"It's exciting to see more and more open," said Hanne Tierney, chairman of the Portland Farmers Market and a steering committee member for Bangor's farmers market. "The demand for local food has increased dramatically. Over the last 10 years, more are opening to meet that demand."

The food revolution coupled with farmers receiving grants for hoop houses to grow hardy veggies year-round has extended the season, said Tierney, who runs Cornerstone Farm in Palmyra. She sells organic vegetables and pasture-raised pork in Bangor, Orono and Portland all winter.

For the second year in a row, farmers take over a convention room on alternate Sundays this winter at Sea Dog Brewing Co. in Bangor. It starts the first weekend in December.

Diverse products from cheese makers, a gluten-free baker, apples and cider, and root vegetables, kale and arugula round out the offerings.

The Queen City welcomes a new farmers market this winter at the Bangor Grange Hall. The first winter version of the Ohio Street Farmers Market runs every other week starting Dec. 9. And on Saturdays, it's always a moveable feast at the European Market at Sunnyside Greenhouses on Buck Street. Think pies, Greek meals, fresh meat and community.

Speaking of community, winter farmers markets are becoming social hubs.

A new cafe has sprung up this year at The Midcoast Winter Farmers Market at the Topsham Fairgrounds. The Friday afternoon market is loaded with organic farmers selling beans and kale and wholesome whole-wheat bread and muffins. Many of these offerings are incorporated into the cafe in the form of panini and soups. Robust coffee from Big Barn Coffee in Wiscasset, and grass-fed beef and chicken livers from the friendly Dick Piper of Piper Ranch in Buckfield make this market a must stop.

The Portland Winter Farmers Market moves to a new location this year. It's still in East Bayside but in a larger space in a former scuba dive shop at 84 Cove St.

"We will be able to have a few
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Camille Giglio plays cello and sings with the new Waldo County music group Sugarbush.



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Sugarbush homesteaders make music together

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

THORNDIKE — On a cold, clear evening deep in the woods of Thorndike, three women gathered in an off-the-grid cabin, plugged in the Christmas lights, got out the wine and homemade chocolate and tuned their instruments.

Then the women — all mothers, Waldo County homesteaders and farmers — opened their voices and lost themselves in song. Sugarbush, a trio formed last January comprising Camille Giglio on the cello, Becca Biggs on the banjo and Amy Green on guitar, has had a busy and eventful year, but there's still nothing the three like bet-

ter than to get together and sing.

"I love the synergy of our connection as friends and sisters together," Giglio, 30, of Thorndike said. "We've often called this our therapy. Creating music together is very intimate and very deep. We go very deep. We know a lot about each other and our lives. I think that comes across when we play for people."

The three took very different paths before meeting, but they all have a longtime love of music and of choosing a simpler, more deliberate lifestyle. Their homes don't all feature in-door plumbing, but they are rich in song, they said, adding that many of their counterculture
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