

Joel and Mary Linker sell varieties of sauerkraut including Applescious, Pickle Dilly, and Caraway flavors.



Kraut Guy Sells Flavored Sauerkraut

A passion to eat well and a plan for staying busy in his retirement led Joel Linker to become The Kraut Guy. "It's been a rewarding experience working this business with my wife Mary in our friend's commercial kitchen and going to farmers markets in and around the Twin Cities," he says.

An article he read about the health benefits of sauerkraut led him to make his first batch.

"After it was ready to eat, I just couldn't stop eating it, and when other people tasted my kraut, they said I should enter the state fair," he says. After that, his interest in sauerkraut grew.

Fermenting cabbage with salt has been around for thousands of years, dating back to Genghis Khan, so he notes there's no secret recipe. The Linkers follow a simple mixture of cabbage and sea salt. Many customers say The Kraut Guy sauerkraut is just like the kraut their grandmothers made in earthenware crocks that they kept in the root cellar.

With the rapid growth of their business, the Linkers eliminated the labor of shredding cabbage and cutting up fruit and vegetables for their kraut blends. They purchase everything shredded or chopped, a decision that's been a lifesaver and allows

them to make larger batches in less time.

"Recently, we processed 600 lbs. of cabbage and other ingredients and spent a week mixing it. We put the ingredients in our buckets, waited three or four weeks for the lacto-fermentation process to do its job, and then filled nearly 1,000 jars for the upcoming markets," Joel says.

In addition to their plain kraut, Joel and Mary have developed other flavors: Applescious (apples and cinnamon), Pickle Dilly (cucumber, dill, and garlic), Latin American (jalapenos, red pepper flakes, Mexican oregano, carrots, and red onions) and the always popular, Classic Caraway.

The Kraut Guy slogan "It's not just for brats anymore!"™ highlights their mission to promote different ways to use sauerkraut.

"Use it with salads, flour tortilla wraps, tacos, pizza, smoothies, Reuben sandwiches, or just a couple of forkfuls every day right out of the jar to maintain good gut health," Mary says.

The Linkers only sell their 16 oz. jars at the farmers' markets but offer preorders online for pickup at the markets.

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FFA Student Turns Pumpkin Project Into A Fulltime Career

Twelve years ago, Kevin Heagy began growing and selling pumpkins as part of a supervised FFA project. Now in his mid-20's, Heagys Pumpkins and Produce is a profitable full-time business.

Upon graduating high school in 2014, Heagy built on his FFA experience and started farming professionally on his family property. Today, he manages 4 acres of growing space that produces more than 40 varieties of pumpkins, as well as mums and garden produce like cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, potatoes, melons, and more. The rest of the family's property is used for beef cattle and corn, wheat, soybeans, and alfalfa hay.

Heagy manages the property with his sister Megan Hostetter, selling at their farmstand just north of Lebanon, Penn. It's open year-round, 6 days a week. Almost everything sold is grown on the farm, within the fields or high tunnels. Kevin's mom Eileen Heagy uses some of the farm bounty to sell pumpkin treats at the stand. Heagy also sells a small amount of produce at local auctions in Lebanon and Lancaster, while his mums do well in local stores.

The farm sells pumpkins suited for every fall activity, including Gladiator pumpkins for those looking for a traditional jack-o-lantern, neck pumpkins for baking pies and custards, and small white pumpkins well-suited for painting projects.

It's also well known for its stacking pumpkins, available in various shapes and sizes for shaping into perfect porch décor. While some shoppers enjoy spending an hour or longer combining pumpkins in different arrangements, Heagy also sells them pre-stacked for extra convenience.

While Heagy hasn't expanded his growing



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space beyond the original 4 acres, he's succeeded in increasing his yield each year.

Fall remains the busiest time of year at the farm stand, with early summer's strawberry season a close second. Fresh produce options are understandably limited in the winter, but the stand stays supplied with eggs and baked goods.

Advertising has mainly been from word of mouth and a few large signs leading into Lebanon. The farm's Facebook page also keeps local shoppers in the know about what's coming into season.

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a day and a half to make with 6 hrs. to rise, Bromfield's 3-day process lets her dough rise for as long as possible. "The longer it goes, the more the gluten breaks down, the more vitamins are released, and the better it tastes," she says. "You do have to find the sweet spot where it isn't over-proofed."

Bromfield follows a standard bread-making process through the first rise and first bulk fermentation. Then she puts it in a refrigerator for an extended second rise. When she takes it out of the refrigerator, it goes directly into the oven.

"It takes a lot more work, but I don't charge more than standard breads because it's so important to my customers," says Bromfield.

Bromfield started out making bread in her kitchen as she experimented with different, older, heritage grains grown locally. Gradually she settled on what are called ancient grains: spelt, rye and emmer. She also uses seeds like fennel, flax, sesame and anise, as well as orange peel and caraway.

"It was a hobby, and I started posting pictures of my bread," recalls Bromfield. "A restaurant owner asked me to make 10 loaves for a fundraiser. When he increased his order to 30 loaves, I almost flipped out."

Suddenly she was making 30 loaves a week, mixing by hand and using her refrigerator and oven. As she got better at it, she realized she could make money baking.

As her reputation spread, she began selling to individuals at farm markets, as well as selling wholesale to restaurants. Eventually, she was baking 60 loaves a day in two ovens in her kitchen.

"I learned wholesale was more work than it was worth and made my individual customers

my priority," says Bromfield.

Over the course of a year, she saved the money she made and began investing in more professional equipment. Her first big buy was a Hobart 30/60 mixer that could make large quantities of dough. Eventually, that was followed by a Rofco oven that can bake 10 loaves at a time and an Avanco refrigeration unit. Everything was installed in her former dining room.

"The other microbakeries got me going," she says. "Now I do about 200 loaves and pastries a week."

Bromfield emphasizes there's a huge demand for bread and pastries made the way she makes them. However, she advises people not to jump into a big investment, borrowing money for equipment. She also warns against responding too quickly to demand.

"It took me a year of saving my money to buy the equipment," she says. "I've had so many requests to ship my bread, it's unbelievable. I don't do it yet, but perhaps someday."

Bromfield admits that even with all the equipment, she may not be making minimum wage for the hours she puts in. She doesn't mind. The payback of customer satisfaction makes up for it.

"People who are gluten intolerant get tired of eating gluten-free baked goods," says Bromfield. "I have people start crying when they learn they can eat my bread."

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Her 3-Day Sourdough Bread Sells Like Hotcakes

Ida Bromfield found a winning combination of ancient grains and a long fermentation for producing customer-winning breads. Her Breadfermented business is so popular that she has to turn away retail prospects just to fill current customer demand, even after upgrading to a professional

microbakery.

"My bread is in very high demand in part because of gluten intolerance," says Bromfield. "The combination of my slow fermentation and lower gluten from the ancient grains allows them to eat my bread."

While standard sourdough bread can take