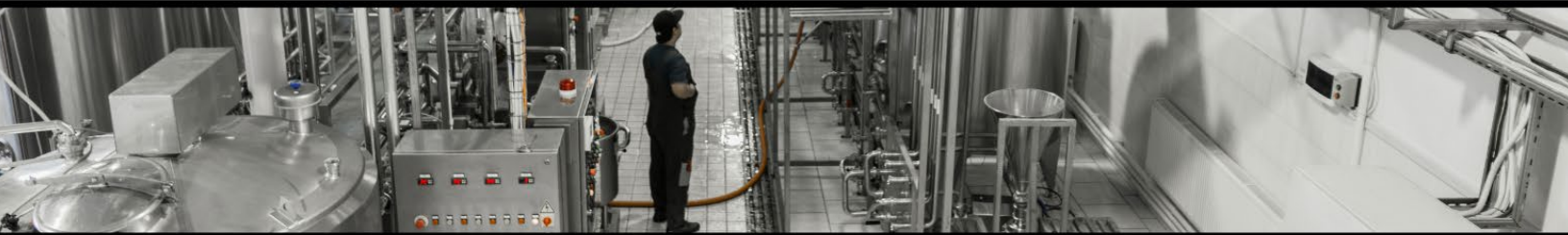


Southeast Dairy Business Innovation Initiative (SDBII)



Testimonials from Dairy Business Grant Award Recipients



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Boxcarr Handmade Cheese
Samantha, Austin, and Paul Genke
Cedar Grove, NC

Boxcarr Handmade Cheese is now in its 6th year of production. Like many businesses we started with just the minimum amount of equipment to start our cheese making business relying more on physical labor. Volume and sales have increased substantially but mechanization of the process has not kept up and we still rely too much on physical labor. This has made us less efficient than we should be and puts physical strain on our employees.

With the Grant from the Dairy Business Innovation Initiative, we will be able to update some of our equipment, add new equipment and relieve some of the physical strain on our employees. The results will be better efficiencies. It will also allow us to offer consistent quality and open new markets.

Raising the pasteurizer and adding a milk pump will allow us to gravity feed into the vats instead of scooping the milk by hand. Flipping stations, drain tables and soaking vats will also reduce some physical labor and increase volume and efficiency.

The market is demanding smaller format cheeses than our current 14-16oz pieces. With the smaller format, 7-8oz, we can open new markets that can't cut and wrap at the store level. New molds, flipping trays and packaging will be needed. A new brochure introducing the new format and cheeses will be produced.

Many of the items will improve quality and consistency including: Lacti-check milk analyzer, cheese presses, an additional walk-in cooler, and better packaging for our soft cheese Freshen and Feta which is packed in liquid. The new equipment that the DBII Grant will make our team's job easier and more productive. At the end of the day, they will go home with more energy to spend with their families.



Brush Creek Swiss Farms
Karen Jordan
Siler City, NC

Our farm, Brush Creek Swiss Farms received our first SDBII (Southeast Dairy Business Innovation Initiative) grant this year. Our grant will be used for a feasibility study to explore options for us in the area of value-added. The feasibility study has been a tremendous blessing to us as we prepare to bring in the next generation for our dairy farm business. We are a small family run operation, and are being surrounded by "mega sites" to support the electric car industry, car manufacturing and battery manufacturing to run the cars. We suspect that we will not be able to purchase any more land in order to expand the business in the traditional way of "milking more cows" and will have to look for revenue sources by expanding what we can offer to the community by adding value to our milk and selling to our local community. The feasibility study will give us guidance going forward as to which value-added products to incorporate, for example, ice cream, A2A2 products, yogurt, kefir, etc. The feasibility study will help us focus our efforts and be more efficient moving forward into an area that we will need much guidance in the future. We will also be looking for opportunities for more grants to help us transition into the value-added business. Currently we sell milk as a commodity. To go forward with the value-added project will require much in the way of new equipment to process our milk into value added products. The SDBII is so helpful for family farms as they look to bring in the next generation. Thank you to USDA for the vision to start this grant process and for providing a path forward to bring in the next generation to keep our dairy farms pursuing innovative ways to remain sustainable.



Buffalo Creek Farm and Creamery, LLC
Robin Blakley
Germanton, NC

Our farmstead micro goat dairy in NC (Buffalo Creek Farm and Creamery) was honored to have received a Southeast Dairy Business Innovation Initiative Program grant in November 2021.

We used the funds to purchase a batch freezer and a blast freezer to be able to produce goat's milk ice cream. Our dairy has been putting aside monies to purchase equipment since 2016 when we attended Penn State's Ice Cream 101 Frozen Dessert Course. This grant put us ahead of the game! Without it, this project would not have been possible.

This value-added product will allow us to become more efficient and profitable. It will reduce the need to either dump milk or cease production of cheesemaking when our refrigerator/freezer/cheese cave space is full of production due to an abundance of spring milk and an increase in butter fat in the fall which increases cheese yield.

While we are awaiting our equipment to be uncrated and installed, the attached picture is of one of our 3rd generation cheesemakers who is anxiously awaiting that first cup of ice cream!



Harmony Lane Farm and Creamery LLC
Julie David
Smithville, TN

The funding I received from the SDBII grant has been most appreciated and has allowed us to grow our farm in ways we could have not done so without the funding. Our soap room was only able to make roughly 144 bars of soap at a time, and now we can produce 1000 bars at a time with the commercial equipment we were able to purchase from Soaper's Market Place with the grant money. We are a Grade A goat dairy and actually sell more soap than we do cheese (well, garlic and herb is pretty close) so to keep up with the demand was extremely difficult, before obtaining the grant.

Our ice cream production has gone from only being able to make 2.5 pints a batch, to making a little over 6 quarts a batch. People love ice cream all during the year, and this brings in new customers that see our sign from the interstate. Now we can keep up with supply and demand. This ice cream maker from Emery Thompson is also able to make other sweet frozen treats so we have more options to expand our product base, like frozen yogurt.

The pictures provided are of our ice cream maker and various pieces of soap equipment. The soap equipment includes a lye tank, oil tank, 80-quart professional pot tipper, heavy duty stick blender, molds, dry trays, and soap cutter, and other small items.

Thank you for allowing me to participate in this program.



**Harvest Moon Farm
Robert Klingenfus
Crestwood, KY**

Attached is a photo of the cheese cutter that SDBII grant funding has allowed us to purchase. The cutter slices 16 uniform pieces of cheese in one stroke. Previously we had trouble keeping the pieces uniform in size and appearance for customers. This is still a problem with end pieces cut from the larger blocks, but we have learned to save these end cuts for samples. There is some learning curve in weighing cheese that goes into each mold, but the cutter aids in uniformity. We previously had a problem with too many underweight cuts being used for samples. It is much easier now to hit our target weights without going under or over by very much. Cheese cutting that took 3 hours is now completed in less than one hour. We really like the machine. It is easy to disassemble, clean, and sanitize. Our plant staff is made up of three retired women wishing to only work for 4 to 5 hours per day twice a week. They have no interest in working more hours. In fact, they would probably quit if I asked them to work full-time. This new equipment has made them more productive and efficient allowing me to justify increasing their wages.



Holly Grove Farms
Debbie Craig
Goldsboro, NC

We at Holly Grove Farms are very excited that we were awarded a grant. The SDBII grant we received will be used for packaging equipment for our farmstead operation. The purchase of this equipment would be impossible without these funds. This equipment will help us to pursue additional markets for our products. The new packaging format will give our product a more professional look to appeal to consumers and increase product shelf life.



Maid-N-Meadows
The Showalter Family
Windsor, KY

Our dairy started over 25 years ago with a passion for cows! It's a family operation and a labor of love. Twelve years ago, we were still functioning as a small, grade A dairy, shipping our milk like most farms do. But with the instability of milk prices, the last price drop pushed us out of the business. Our cows went out to pasture, and we set ourselves to work.

Through scratching and saving we paid back our former dairy debt and then dove right back in. This time we come with a mission. We are going to build a network of family farms that can rely on a stable price for their milk, by making unique and high value products in our cheese facility. We are going to build a regional community that values knowing where their food comes from and is excited to support artisanal excellence. And finally, we are going to make products that exceed expectations in every way possible.

This has been a tall order! We have created a supportive community for our product but have struggled with our capacity to grow. Profit margins in our sector tend to be low, and coupled with our limited production capacity, we have found it hard to expand, hire help, utilize other dairies' milk, and get the specialized food safety/cheese making training needed for a superior product.

Thanks to the SDBII grant, we are getting a helping hand on these challenges, and we can't wait to pay that forward to our community through milk purchases, a new job opening, and improved food safety and technical product support. We have attended workshops and listened to webinars from home on food safety and HACCP. We have continued our education on animal husbandry, even involving our children in these webinars! And most exciting, through this grant we are going to be able to expand our facility capacity and improve the safety of our product through the purchase of a pasteurizer! I can't express how grateful and excited I am for this opportunity and can't wait to use it to pursue our ultimate goal of making sure that family dairy farms continue to be a profitable and secure occupation for the next generation of farmers.

Thank you for your efforts and support of family farms. We hope to make you proud!



Ocoee Creamery
George Haynes
Old Fort, TN

My name is George Haynes and I own a small grade A dairy in southeast TN. As a young agriculture student, I always dreamed of owning a creamery. As a young man I studied animal science and worked in dairy processing facilities to gain knowledge to chase my dream. When I was 28, I decided it was time to make my move and start my creamery. However, I found out real quick, the struggle of a young farmer to start a farm. It was financially overwhelming to just get in business. I had to make compromises just to be able to start my operation. These compromises led to inefficient production that was very time consuming and limiting. To grow a dairy operation, it requires so many aspects like farmland, barns, feed bins, commodity sheds, farm equipment, fencing, processing facility space, milking equipment, processing equipment, and packaging equipment. At times it seemed like such an uphill battle to be successful, it's no wonder so many young people are leaving the farm. My operation started small, which means small production, small revenue, and small growth. I knew I needed to make upgrades, but I didn't have the funds. That's why I was thankful for the SDBII grant that was awarded to me. It gave me the opportunity to make the most financially challenging upgrade I faced. I was able to buy a pasteurizing cheese vat that has the capacity to produce over three times the amount of product in a production run than my previous equipment allowed. I wouldn't have been able to make this upgrade for 3-5 years without the grant. Thanks to the grant, the equipment has given me the capability to grow my operation and be a more successful dairy farmer. As of March 2022, the equipment has been utilized in my operation. I have already seen increased production, revenue, and efficiency. Thanks to this grant I am better able to provide for my family, grow my business, and reach for my dream of owning a successful creamery.



Ran-Lew Dairy
Randy Lewis and Taylor Hayes
Graham, NC

The SDBII program has had a huge, concrete impact on every aspect of our farm's revenue streams—both current and future. It's hard to quantify the impact that this grant will have on our business, but it is defining the future of the farm. The SDBII program is the difference between the dairy ending with Randy's generation, or continuing into Taylor's.

We received a large grant award from the SDBII program to expand our milk plant and add a yogurt production line.

It's no secret that over the past several decades the dairy industry has been gutted by low milk prices and high input costs, and we were no exception. The efficiency models currently in place are not financially sustainable for us as a mid-sized producer. We're a fifth-generation farm, and in 2013 it was apparent that the farm was no longer financially viable. From there we had two options – make value-added products, or quit farming. We chose to start a milk plant on the farm and produce cream-top milk. We've found we need to keep adding products to sustain the business. The plant expansion enables us to utilize all the milk we produce and buy more milk from other small producers, bringing a larger impact to our community and local economy. The SDBII program is ensuring we keep not only our jobs, but our way of life.

Executing the grant will put us on a stable financial footing, making us less susceptible to economic fluctuations, and solidify the farm's viability for generations to come.

We're currently working towards regulatory approval to begin purchasing equipment and completing the grant.

We also received a SDBII scholarship to the NAFDMA International Agritourism Association's annual conference, where we learned ways to use agritourism as another revenue stream. As Randy approaches retirement age, he is looking to agritourism as a large part of his future input to the farm. As he becomes less hands-on with the cows and milk plant, the lessons he learned from the SDBII scholarship heavily influence the direction and success of Randy's new revenue stream.

Next week, we look forward to attending the Value-Added Dairy Conference created by the SDBII program, which offers a one-of-a-kind meeting place for people in our industry.

The SDBII program empowers us to grow our business in a way that supports other farms and families. Thanks to the SDBII program, we have a future to look forward to.



Sequatchie Cove Creamery
Randall Tomlinson
Coppinger Cove, TN

When I first discovered the SDBII grant program it seemed too good to be true. I have been in value-added dairy for about 10 years on both the dairy side and the cheese side and this is by far the best program I have seen for small farmers and small business owners like ourselves. In 2020 COVID decimated our business, we did not think we would be able to survive and our plans for expansion and success seemed set back by at least 5 years. Everything changed through this grant, we began to see with some new pieces of equipment we could reach our financial goals much quicker and have a larger impact than we previously imagined. Our list of problems changed from “how are we going to even survive another month?” to “how are we going to hire enough people?” and “where are we going to find enough milk?” Exciting new problems.

The equipment is slow to arrive, it takes a long time to custom build specialty cheese making equipment, so we haven't seen the tides turn financially quite yet. However, through the DBII we were able to fund business training, personnel management training, and attend an agritourism conference. We're excited to start a business evaluation with the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD), also made available through DBII. Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of being involved in this program has been meeting folks from all over the Southeast, all of which are doing amazing things to keep small dairy alive. I feel a part of a dairying community for the first time (despite the distance between our operations). Each of these ancillary benefits of the DBII program has only strengthened our confidence in ourselves and our outlook. The SDBII program has completely changed our business' future.



Simply Natural Creamery
Holly Rollins
Ayden, NC

I wanted to write to express my gratitude for receiving funding from the SDBII grant. This funding will tremendously help Simply Natural Creamery expand our operations. We plan to expand our operation by adding special equipment needed to process cheese at our dairy/creamery. Our local community and much of eastern North Carolina consumers will be able to purchase Simply Natural Creamery cheese products because of this funding.

With rising costs of equipment and many other challenges that the dairy industry is facing today, this expansion of our operation would not be possible without the funding of the SDBII grant. Simply Natural Creamery is very grateful for this opportunity to expand dairy in our area.



Wildcat Mountain Cheese
Clara Patton
East Bernstadt, KY

Wildcat Mountain Cheese is working toward improving efficiency with the purchase and implementation of a multi-wire cheese cutter. The new cutter allows a person to cut about 15-20 pieces at one time versus one piece previously. Cutting smaller 4-ounce units of cheese is also more accurate with this cutter. The multi-wire cheese cutter was placed in use in June.

A Food Processor was ordered in May. It was unknowingly backordered with receipt anticipated in July. Upon receipt, cheeses will be shredded and sold packaged or incorporated into spreadable cheese, such as Pimiento Cheese Spread.

