

Butter ready to be rolled.



Creamery Butter Fetches Top Dollar

Hilary Haigh makes her butter with the greatest care from the milk of her 14 Jersey cows. She even lets the cream separate naturally from the milk, then ladles it by hand for churning. The process has earned her a customer base of top chefs and a consumer following willing to pay \$60 per lb. It's also a process and a customer base she inherited when she and her husband, Ben, took over the herd from its founder.

"Diane St. Clair started with a single cow in 2000 and a desire to make butter for herself," explains Haigh. "On a whim, she sent it to a chef, and he was impressed with the quality. From there, she grew the herd to meet his demand. Soon, other chefs became interested, and it fit a niche for table butter marketed to high-end restaurants."

In 2022, the Haighs heard that St. Clair was planning to exit the butter-making business. When Haigh was younger,

she house-sat and helped care for St. Clair's animals, including the herd. In the intervening years, she and Ben started their own small farm, producing grass-fed and pastured meats. They made an offer, and it was accepted.

"I trained with Diane on making the butter and got to know her system for handling the cows," says Haigh. "When we transferred the cows and equipment to our farm, it went seamlessly. The only change we made was to buy a bigger ladle."

Marketing the butter went seamlessly as well.

"I called the chefs and introduced myself, explaining who we were and where we were going with the business," says Haigh. "They were excited the product would continue."

St. Clair's initial chef contact and Haigh's phone call are the total of the marketing that builds and maintains the brand. The butter can be found at a handful of restaurants

in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Napa, Calif. What's left over goes to Saxelby Cheesemongers in New York City. There, it's priced at \$60 under the Animal Farm brand, but don't be surprised if it's sold out.

What makes the butter so highly valued that it has its own cult following? Start with the Jersey cows, whose high-fat milk is key. Like St. Clair, Haigh avoids mechanical separation, which she believes breaks up the fat globules in the cream. After gentle pasteurization, the cream is cultured with buttermilk as a starter.

"The taste of the butter comes from the cream, not from a commercial culture," explains Haigh.

A day later, she churns out the butter and kneads it by hand to separate the buttermilk byproduct. Haigh describes the butter as rich in mouthfeel, fragrant on the nose, and naturally changing with the seasons.

She describes the buttermilk as light and tangy, with butter flecks that melt in your mouth. It's distributed regionally.

"We have weekly standing orders for how much we have to produce, and it all goes out immediately, with no storage or looking for buyers," says Haigh. "If we had to spend time marketing, it would eat into our time."

Haigh and her husband have no interest in expanding the herd or selling more butter. They have other priorities, including three sons, a flock of 100 ewes, and raising Jersey/Angus calves for the local market.

"We breed only the best cows to Jersey bulls for replacement heifers," says Haigh. "The rest are bred to Angus bulls. The calves get the skim milk for up to six months."

Before taking on the dairy, the Haighs had brood cows. To make room for the Jerseys'

pasture and hay, they sold the beef cows. Their old customers are more than satisfied with the new beef.

"When they tasted the Jersey beef, they were floored," says Haigh. "They said it was amazing. We sell out every year with no advertising."

Haigh notes that it's the quality of the product that matters, whether it's beef or butter or sold to chefs or consumers.

"Setting a price is the hardest part, but being able to get what you need is so important," says Haigh. "As demand went up, we were able to raise our price to cover our increased costs."

She admits it's intimidating to think about where her butter goes.

"Again and again, we get comments from our chefs and customers that they've never tasted anything like it," says Haigh. "The quality of the milk and the cream is what makes our butter what it is. If you put everything you can into it, you know the quality is there."

The Haighs don't sell butter at the farm or ship retail. They also don't offer tours. For wholesale inquiries about butter or buttermilk, email Haigh. To purchase the butter, visit Saxelby Cheesemongers' website. Be forewarned: it sells out so quickly that the company posts when it'll be restocked down to the hour.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Animal Farm Creamery, Shoreham, Vt. (hillary@animalfarmcreamery.com; www.animalfarmcreamery.com) or Saxelby Cheesemongers, Chelsea Market, 75 9th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011 (ph 646-892-3077; www.saxelbycheese.com).



Brown (right) taking delivery of his third 60-in. stone mill in 2024, with grain storage on either side.

Texas Miller Boosts Regional Grains

James Brown is a unique kind of businessman. He sells grains by the berry and as milled flour, but most of all, he promotes regional grains. He even encourages customers outside his area to explore heirloom grains grown locally and the millers who turn them into flour.

"I strongly believe that if you have a regional grain economy, you should support it," says Brown. "If we're selling something they don't have, we're happy to help, but we want you to support them too."

It's all part of a love story that began when he decided to bake some bread.

He loved it. His wife loved it, too, and his life was transformed. A virtuoso classical musician, he sold his viola da gamba in mid-2016 and bought a flour mill.

"I'd started reading about stone-milled flour, and I went down the rabbit hole," says Brown. "I read about and talked to people who knew how to work with whole grains from their area and grinding them or using flour from artisan millers who used grains from the region."

Unable to find a ready source of old wheat varieties grown in Texas, he made his own. He started with a 1919 USDA report listing

the wheat varieties grown in each state and their acreages. The Texas section became his shopping list.

"I found a few farmers growing some yet in Texas, and one was being grown in Saskatchewan," says Brown. "For the others I couldn't find, I turned to the USDA germplasm repository in Colorado. I received 100 grams of wheat berries for each, and we began to grow them out."

It took Brown and cooperating Texas farmers three years to produce a truckload of each variety, enough for some milling and reseeding.

Today, Brown's Barton Springs Mill (BSM) operates a 17,000-sq. ft. facility. He has long since moved on from his first flour mill. BSM uses two Osttiroler mills from Austria, with a combined capacity of 4,650 lbs. per 10-hr. day.

The business produces and distributes products to home bakers across the continental U.S. Products include whole wheat and rye berries; organic stone-milled flour; and organic blue and yellow corn, available as kernels and milled into grits, cornmeal and polenta. BSM also markets legumes, rice, and flour from ancient grains—einkorn, spelt and emmer.

Berries, kernels and milled products are available in 2 1/2 and 5-lb. bags for home bakers. Select grains and flour are also available in 47-lb. bags at wholesale prices.

Commercial customers include a bakery within the BSM facility and Treaty Oak Distilling next door. BSM products are also available at many other bakeries, distilleries and breweries in Texas and beyond.

Brown does everything he can to share and promote his passion for baking and regional grains through a website that educates, informs and inspires bakers and enthusiasts. Suggested uses are provided for each grain and flour.

The BSM website offers a wide range of content, including recipes, merchandise, books and more. Recipes are organized by end-product type and grain type. The Learn & Do section provides instructions for cooking and sprouting whole berries, working with sourdough, and various uses such as pizza, pasta, quick breads and breakfast dishes. The "Wheat Cheat Sheet" features information on the grains available from BSM, including their origin, taste, aroma and where they're grown for BSM.

The FAQ provides definitions and explanations of basic terms, from whole berry to falling number, a technical term used to assess grain quality.

For those nearby, BSM offers tours and classes. These classes introduce students to making pastries, breads and other baked goods, from baguettes to tamales to fancy pastries.

BSM has an extensive list of YouTube videos about the company, its mill, the farmers who grow its grain, which flour to choose, and much more.

Brown credits much of the business's growth to his farmer sources, quality-focused employees, and stone mills. However, the significant rise in home bakers' interest in regional grains is truly driving the business. BSM is seeing 35% year-over-year sales growth. But that's only surpassed by the growth in whole-grain sales, as more people discover the benefits of home milling.

"Demand for whole wheat and rye berries has exploded," he says. "We're experiencing 55% growth in them year over year."

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