



On the Rise

Harvest Moon Bagel Co. takes shape using organic ingredients

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Watching a professional baker boil 15 dozen bagels before the sun rises is an eye-opening experience, and only partly from all the coffee I consume during the lesson. My teacher is Chelsea Zawisa, owner of Harvest Moon Bagel Co.

Zawisa, 26, is a 2011 graduate of the Pastry Arts program at York Technical Institute. Her first business venture was the Happy Belly Bakery stand at Lancaster East Side Market, where she made a unique assortment of organic goodies, including the Vegan Twinkie. Since forming Harvest Moon Bagel Co. in June, she's focused on keeping things simple. The business currently operates out of Commonwealth Kitchen & Café, in a renovated space formerly occupied by Skinny Park Juice, and is Lancaster city's source for handmade, organic bagels and spreads. Delivery is even an eco-friendly option, thanks to Zawisa's zero-emission electric car.

Part one of my bagel-making lesson takes place after the café closes for the evening. Folktronic music plays from a smartphone on the worktop while Zawisa mixes 60 pounds of dough and shows me a few different ways to roll a bagel. When the last chunk of dough has been rolled and shaped, everything goes into the proofer for the night.

I arrive at the café for part two of the lesson at 6:30 a.m. She's been there for an hour already, to start an order of bagels scheduled for delivery that day. In the calm before the morning rush, I cling to my coffee while Zawisa is in her element – boiling, seasoning and baking – and we discuss the business of bagels.

J: Why bagels?

C: My husband, Zach, got me into bagels. It's a tradition in his family to have them at get-togethers. I like making things that people wouldn't think to make themselves. And when I found a recipe in one of my cookbooks from college, I figured I'd try making them at home.

J: How did you figure out the steps to starting a business?

C: There's a nonprofit organization for business development in Lancaster called ASSETS. I went to their Learning Circle classes, which is a 10-week program for just \$75. I thought that was pretty amazing. Each week we focused on a different aspect of business.

J: Were the classes helpful?

C: The classes were good for me because they really gave me a chance to just sit down and focus on getting everything together and think about how it will work, money-wise. I had some start-up expenses that included the eco-friendly packaging I use. Also, organic flour is not cheap, but it's important to me that I don't use crappy ingredients. Daisy Flour, the brand I use, is a local company from Annville that supports small farms. I go to places locally that have organic ingredients in bulk, like Miller's in Bird in Hand and Ebenezer's in Ephrata. I go to Lancaster Central Market to get matcha to make my honey matcha cream cheese.

J: What exactly is matcha and why are people so in love with it?

C: It's a powdered green tea. But it's like the equivalent of drinking 10 cups of tea with all of the nutrients and a slower, longer release of the caffeine.

J: Has there been a lot of support from other women in the small business community?

C: Yes. Especially from ASSETS. They've been so helpful. It's a nice group to be a part of. It makes me feel empowered. Anne Kirby, one of the founders of the Candy Factory, has a group called Kick-Ass Female Entrepreneurs that meets at different places throughout the city. It's an evening where women in business can get together and hear a different speaker each time. It's good for networking, which I'm really bad at. The first time I went I just sort of waited for someone to come up and start talking to me. Luckily, someone did.

J: What's the best way to keep bagels fresh?

C: Usually, you'll want to eat them the same day they're made, but they'll still be good in about five days if stored in a sealable plastic bag. If they're in a paper bag for more than a day, they'll go stale.

J: What's your favorite bagel-and-cream-cheese combo?

C: I like a cinnamon crunch bagel with a honeycomb-candy butter. I also like a garlic bagel with sundried tomato or jalapeño cilantro lime cream cheese.

• Harvest Moon Bagel Co.
For catering, delivery and wholesale:
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