

Fuzzy Udder Creamery

PROFILE: Value Added Producer Grant Recipient

WV1114ME

\$177,717

2017-2020

To pay costs to produce and market artisan cheeses from goat and sheep milk. Working capital funds will be used for marketing, attending and participating in conferences, packaging, labeling, and labor, in an effort to expand markets and increase customers.

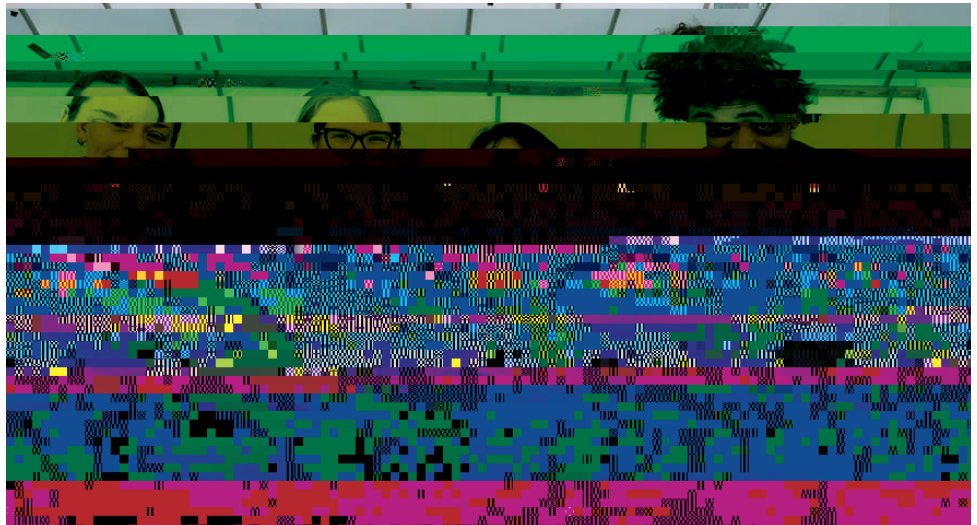
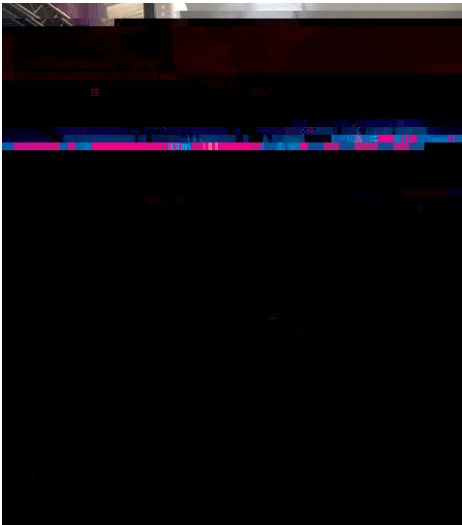
Jessie Dowling of Fuzzy Udder Creamery makes a variety of fresh, soft-ripened, and aged cheeses from sheep, goat, and cow milk. In 2018, they were milking 53 sheep and goats, and bought in organic jersey cow's milk. Motivated by her commitment to social and environmental justice and strengthening local communities, Jessie's goal is to make a decent living as a farmer and still have time to give back to her community while enjoying life. Fuzzy Udder is located in a rural agricultural community. With four dairy farms on her road, Jessie says "We're the 'farmiest four miles in Maine.'"

How is the public engaged with Fuzzy Udder?

The public is engaged through direct purchasing of cheeses and about six on-farm events a year. Jessie hopes to further diversify through additional events, hosting cheese-making and related workshops, accommodations, farm camp, and fiber products once her facility is open. Some of her events are coordinated with other farms, such as the Mid-State Cheese Trail and Open Farm Day.

Fuzzy Udder hosts three Kid-Hugging Days in the spring where people come and snuggle goat kids: Kid Hugging events are a great way to make money. And there's nothing better than seeing a four year old snuggle a lamb or kid. They'll remember that for the rest of their lives."

Fuzzy Udder Farm



IMPACT OF VAPG FUNDING

The VAPG has given her time to determine how to make the business profitable. Without it, Dowling says she would have stopped milking by now, and would buy milk to make cheese.

“I would have had to stop milking without the grant. I have a great FSA mortgage that only farmers can get, where you put no money down. But the catch is, like the VAPG grant, you must produce 50% of the product on site. If I was a smart business person, I would buy milk to make cheese, but I can’t do that because of my loan and my VAPG grant. In some ways I’m growing my milking herd because I can’t pay my mortgage without it.”

The VAPG has been a double edge sword for her. She’s concluded that it’s expensive and not profitable to run a dairy at this time.

Dowling had the vision and wrote most of the application herself, but worked with a consultant on the forms, which she highly recommends. Although she had to pay employees for additional time while she worked on the grant, she was encouraged because she knew exactly how she wanted to use it and knew it would benefit her business if she received it.

She concedes that the grant reporting takes a lot more time than she anticipated (about 6 hours a month). “As a small owner-operated creamery with a small staff, sitting down and devoting time to the paperwork is hard. The money isn’t just handed to you. You have to spend the money first, but you have to prove how you spent every penny. They need a ton of documentation, and because their payments are based on reimbursement and it’s a matching grant you’re basically paying for something twice before you get it once.”

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THE VAPG PROGRAM?

Yes. “I think you should get money where you can get it.” She cautions those who aren’t natural record-keepers against applying, but those who are operating dairies or creameries are detailed record keepers by nature.



©2018. Funding provided by the Agriculture Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC), located at Iowa State University, www.agmrc.org. AgMRC is a national website dedicated to providing information to producers and service providers on value-added agriculture businesses. These partners collaborated to create the Value Added Producer Grant.

