

[Diversify Your Minnesota Farm Business Through Food Service:](#)

[A How-to Manual for Serving Food on your Farm, From Farm-To-Table Dinners to Pizza Farms and More](#)

Diversify Your Minnesota Farm Business Through Food Service:  
Case Study: Stoney Acres Farm (Athens, WI)

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Pizza Adds Diversification to Farm Income Menu

“Diversification proves to be a win-win as it inspires us to continually be creatively challenging ourselves, thinking proactively about the future and always asking ‘what if,’” explains Kat Becker, co-owner with her husband, Tony Schultz, of Stoney Acres Farm. Their certified organic operation is located in about thirty miles west of Wausau in North Central Wisconsin. “Doing a weekly, on-farm pizza night proved to be one of our most lucrative and fun ventures yet and brings together the ultimate combination for us: sharing what we grow and raise directly with our community right on our land.”

Now in their eighth season of farm production, Becker and Schultz run a highly diversified operation and serve as the third generation of farmers on Schultz’s family land. The core of Stoney Acres Farm includes a twenty week CSA vegetable operation (Community Supported Agriculture), along with herb, fruit and flower production; raising grass fed beef, pastured pork and chicken; organic grains; maple syrup; and their newest venture, which officially opened in 2012: farm to table pizzas served on Friday nights from May through November.

“Diversifying into pizza made strategic sense on multiple levels as we already raised or grew most of the key ingredients, from pigs for the sausage to vegetables for toppings,” explains [Becker](#). Their key pizza cost is cheese, which adds up to \$2,000 annually and is purchased direct from regional cheesemakers. “We saw the growing interest in pizza farms in other parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota and knew we could take advantage of being the first such venture in our north-central part of the state.”

For those starting on the pizza farm business journey, Stoney Acres Farm offers five core pieces of advice:

1) Take Time for Research and Planning

Stoney Acres’ pizza operation showcases the importance of researching and planning strategically when a diversification idea requires an investment. “Installing a commercial kitchen isn’t as intimidating as you think, but we did need to research and understand the requirements so as to use our money wisely,” adds [Becker](#).

The commercial kitchen was part of a granary remodel and included \$2,000 for the kitchen equipment, purchased at auction, and installing washable walls. Their total cost was around \$5,000, doing much of the labor themselves.

**Comment [JJ1]:** Jane will need to help me here, but LFAC had a conversation about things that could and couldn't be done DIY in terms of commercial kitchens.

“Take the time to visit other operations and learn how others are doing things,” Becker continues. “We gained much insight from Robbi Bannen and Ted Fisher at A to Z Pizza Farm. They really put the pizza farm concept on the map and were super supportive in helping us get started with their seasoned advice from visiting other operations and seeing how others do things.”

**Comment [JI2]:** Jane: Per Jan's comment above, it may just be clearer/easiest to NOT include anything in the WI case studies that will appear in this MN manual that are in conflict with MN regulations to avoid confusion (i.e., just let me know if something like this labor comment should be deleted)

- Collaborate and Ask Questions

“Remember that state inspectors and agency folks are on your side and truly want your business to succeed, but they have their rulebooks so that proper and safe procedures are carried out and you need to fit into their boxes,” advises Becker. “Keeping dialogue open and transparent from the start really helped us develop strong working relationships with our local inspectors. We started talking way before we broke ground or spent anything, so we'd all be on the same page.”

**Comment [JJ3]:** Will A to Z be inundated with requests if we identify them – and maybe that is OK if they have a business strategy to charge for their advice.

However, if specific rules and requirements don't make sense to you and your situation, don't be intimidated to ask questions. “Remember the inspectors are just following their checklists and are not really empowered to change things. If you want something different, you'll need to go higher up the agency channel, ask for an exemption and get it in writing,” Becker offers.

**Comment [JI4]:** Good point (A to Z will be their own case study but still . . . made the point a bit more general – will run by Becker).

Such was the case for Stoney Acres and cooking sausage. Per code, they needed an exhaust vent over the stove when cooking meat, which would have cost over \$10,000. Given the fact that they are only operating one night a week during the summer season and spending just a few hours actually cooking the meat, Stoney Acres contacted the head state inspector and asked for an exemption, which he granted. “Once we showed that official state piece of paper authorizing the exemption to our local inspector, they then had all they needed and the whole thing went away, but we had to initiate the exemption process and ask,” Becker adds.

- Keep Evolving

The pizza business keeps growing for Becker and Schultz: In 2013, Stoney Acres sold over \$30,000 in pizzas at \$18 to \$20 a pizza and are looking to double that in 2014. “We realized after some super high volume nights during which we had to refund money because folks were waiting over an hour for their pizza, that we needed a second oven to keep up with demand, which we added mid-season this year. That made a huge difference immediately,” Schultz explains. “We're still trying to figure out the best work flow and how much staff we need to best handle peak season nights where we'll be pumping out way over 100 pizzas.”

To further diversify income, Stoney Acres sets up a small farmers' market stand right next to the spot where attendees order and pay for pizza, which adds up to a couple hundred dollars in sales per event. “We sell at the Wausau Farmers Market the next day on Saturday morning, so our produce is already harvested and it's easy to set up a small market table at pizza night,” shares Schultz. “The market stand also helps us visually explain a certain topping item that folks may be unfamiliar with, like a garlic scape.” Stoney Acres blends unusual items like scapes

into different weekly specials posted on their Facebook page, such as “Scape Goat Returns,” with local goat cheese, diced garlic scapes, thinly sliced ham and mixed summer squash.

- Be True to Your Values

With sustainability driving Stoney Acres, Becker and Schultz continually make decisions with environmental values in mind. Pizzas are served on reusable pans (cardboard boxes are provided for take-out) and you won’t find any Styrofoam anywhere. Compost buckets collect food scraps for pig feed. Stoney Acres provides water for free but doesn’t sell any other beverages, including soda. “I just don’t believe in soda,” laughs Becker. “You can bring it if you want, but we’re just providing good old water.”

Running a family-friendly business is also an important value of Stoney Acres. Their own three young kids are a part of the pizza night scene, under the watchful eye of grandparents while Becker and Schultz work. Five-year old Riley already embraces the family’s entrepreneurial spirit: He harvests sunflowers and sells them to guests for a dollar a stem.

- Prioritize Your Core Customers

“The core of Stoney Acres Farm remains our CSA and we are fully committed to our members,” explains Becker. “These families form the backbone of our operation and believe in what this farm stands for and they support us through the ups and downs of small-scale agriculture.” This group also makes up the core marketing for pizza night, primarily growing the business through word of mouth.

The pizza farm venture reaches beyond an income source for Becker and Schultz; it’s a coming together of everything they value and their vision for the farm. “We believe in creating a family farm that serves our local community, moving toward environmental sustainability while providing a beautiful and constructive setting to raise a family,” explains Schultz. “When we see people enjoying our pizza as the sun sets on our land and kids are running around catching fireflies, it all comes together for us and is so incredibly rewarding.”

**Comment [J75]:** This case study is great. I wonder if we might want to address some of the regulatory points in Rachel’s chapter for each of these case studies : e.g. Zoning, water, liability ...