

## Farm to Consumer Foundation, Farmer Interview #3, Dan Kremer

**The Farm to Consumer Foundation** is dedicated to encouraging the right of consumers to choose fresh nutritious foods and promote farming practices that focus on supplying these consumers with the products they prefer. There has been a very large increase in the number of families that want their milk, fresh, unpasteurized and unhomogenized (unprocessed). These consumers want to know the farmer and how the farm is managed.

We are impressed with the variety of farming practices that have emerged to supply this product to those families. It is obvious to us that there is no single model for fresh unprocessed whole milk production. There are also other business models, many different versions of State oversight, differing consumer preferences, and very different geographies.

This interview is the third in our series of conversations with dairy producers across the USA that are producing fresh unprocessed milk for their neighbors. Through these talks we will highlight the diversity of operations and business models, the practical aspects of fresh milk production, and the enthusiasm these farmers have in their daily work. We continue this series with Dan Kremer, who operates a business called E.A.T. Food for Life ([eatfoodforlife.com](http://eatfoodforlife.com)), which includes cow and goat herdshare programs, meat production, crop farming, and a farm store.

Dan grew up on a dairy farm, earned degrees in Engineering and Business Administration, worked in business for 12 years, and then returned to the family farm in 1997. There, he and his family of six raise chicken, beef, and pork, and grow multiple grains. Responding to customer demand for Jersey milk, his sister's family, Deb and Scott, next door started a Jersey dairy herd that produces fresh unpasteurized milk and related products. Dan manages their herdshare program. In 2001, Dan opened a farm store for his herdshare owners that offers a variety of products from his own and others' farms, including meat, dairy products, bread, and eggs, as well as vegetables, kombucha, kraut, grains, spices, and breads. His operation is the primary source for fresh unpasteurized dairy products in Dayton, and he has developed a distribution system that serves the major cities in southwest Ohio.

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**Jim:** How long have you been EAT Food for Life? When did you come up with that name?

**Dan:** I came back to the farm in '97 and started organic certification in '98. The farm was certified organic in 2001, so that's really when we started the store and started building a brand recognition of the E.A.T. Food for Life name. E-A-T sounds like it's just "eat," but it's really E meaning Eucharist, which is thanksgiving, and A for Agrarian, which means a really small farm, and then T is truth, for the mind, so to the degree that we nourish our body, mind, and soul we have life and have it to the full. It's all three components of soul, body, and mind.

**Jim:** How would you describe your business? Dairy's only part of it, I think.

**Dan:** The dairy is 50% of our business. We refer to our core products as meat, milk, bread, and eggs, and then we have some other miscellaneous things. We don't raise vegetables, but act as a drop-off location for George Mertz Patchwork Gardens.

**Jim:** How did you go about adding products you didn't make yourself, on your farm, in the first place?

**Dan:** The way we added them was, for example, Hidden Pond made kraut, kombucha, and different syrups—Elderberry and Hawthorn syrup. They were already set up to sell wholesale, so we simply made an order with them. We knew of their product. We were actually one of the first farms to wholesale and retail with them, so they just grew out of that. I think they found us at a farmers' market.

**Jim:** What issues are involved in selling other producers' products? How does that work?

**Dan:** Right. So the principal thing is having constant inventory. We monitor our inventory and ensure that we don't go below a certain level. And then, we buy at wholesale price and sell at retail price. We add these products to our own on our price list, which is on our website, online.

**Jim:** Now you've got a store on the farm. How many people do you have working on the farm?

**Dan:** We have one inside person, who runs the store, answers phone calls, fills website orders, tracks herd shares, and does bookkeeping, and one outside person, who does inventory control and packs the trailer for deliveries. Both are important because I need help. My wife, Nancy, also does a lot. And then we have our younger children, David, 14, and Rose, 11. They help out with chores and misc.

**Jim:** As your older children were growing up, they were helping on the farm too, weren't they?

**Dan:** Right. There is a progression, so Maria was helping up until age 18. And then I had Ben and Rita helping out, until they were 18. Joe also worked until this year, when he turned 18. Each of them had a progression based on their age, working on the farm.

**Jim:** They probably learned pretty good work ethics doing that. That's something a lot of kids don't have nowadays.

**Dan:** That's a hidden value that constancy and discipline is built into the farm activity.

**Jim:** I've heard you call real milk the "gateway product." What does that mean?

**Dan:** When I say milk, I really mean milk, cream, yogurt, butter, cheese. It's all those products, even though all of them come from a gallon of milk. We find that customers get the greatest benefit from raw milk. I mean raw dairy products in general. So, we call raw milk the gateway, because consumers come first and foremost for the raw dairy product, and then it makes sense to get a dozen eggs, a pack of meat, a loaf of bread, that type of thing. Initially, people come for the anchor product, the milk.

**Jim:** How did you first market E.A.T. Food for Life? What were your first tools?

**Dan:** I started going to the Dayton Farmers' Market at 2nd Street in 2008, and I remember that first year, for the most part, all we had was eggs. Then, we transitioned to having eggs and milk and a little bit of meat. In the beginning, we sold the milk at 2nd Street Public

Market as pet food. And there was no issue, really no questions. We had a real little booth. And then, it progressed from there to more tribulation, when the 2nd Street market said we couldn't sell milk as pet food there any longer. We had to move it away from the market and go to a Herd Share Program. Of course, that gets into that whole chapter of the herd share. But in the beginning, yes, the 2nd Street Public Market was the first launching point as far as getting exposure and doing product.

**Jim:** For a while, you were the Weston A. Price Chapter leader. How did that improve your market share?

**Dan:** In the beginning, here at Yorkshire, a lot of our business came from the Weston A. Price chapter, because we had Dr. Wayne Fister, who gave regular talks at our storefront. He's a chiropractor about an hour north of here. He gave talks on different things that aligned with Weston A. Price philosophy in terms of food and how food is produced, processed, and prepared. That was a good outreach tool and a way to educate people, basically at no charge. We did that at Dayton as well, and it was an effective strategy to let people know that they could get that type of education in Dayton.

**Jim:** You had on-farm festivals from 2002 to 2007. What was the effectiveness of those? Would you recommend that?

**Dan:** Yes. That did work well, and it was free. It also got people to come to the farm, learn about organics, learn about the farm, learn about our products. We find in today's climate, that customers are time bankrupt. They don't have the time to commit to that, or if they do want to commit to it, it's a Friday night kind of thing: "Hey, let's go to the farm field day tomorrow." Well, then it's too late for us. We need a commitment long before that. I know other producers have sold tickets. The farm fest is a product: you buy a ticket, and then you can come to farm fest day and enjoy yourself. We may get back to that. We're kind of toying with that idea. We just know that it takes lots of work to do a farm fest day, to offer that product, because it's just once a year.

**Jim:** What tools have you used on your website for marketing?

**Dan:** Currently, we use GrazeCart (grazecart.com). I think GrazeCart is one of the key tools to use because it caters to the small farm. We find it easy to use and highly recommend them. They have different plans, so you can do it for as little as \$50 a month, which is absolutely minimal. Or it can be \$100 a month, or it can be \$150 a month. Each of these plans provide different levels of service and benefit. But I think that it's an absolute must in the climate we're living, to have a way that the consumer can place their order quickly, easily, conveniently, and then get their products. Because if it's not quick, easy, and convenient, they aren't going to place an order.

**Jim:** Who does your website? Is that somebody local in your area?

**Dan:** GrazeCart does it. They're in Indiana.

**Jim:** They do your whole network, not just your shopping cart?

**Dan:** They do the website and the shopping cart. They are both contained as one offering.

**Jim:** How do you use Facebook?

**Dan:** We point people to our Facebook page. When we get an email from someone, we'll point them to our Facebook page. There's all kinds of little bells and whistles on Facebook. We don't pay anything on Facebook, so that's important to note. That is all free. Whereas the website, we do obviously pay for that service. Facebook is a powerful engine to let people know that we're a small farm offering a grass-fed organic product. However, we are now concerned about their censorship activities.

**Jim:** What methods do you find to be the most effective for communicating with new customers, and how do you outreach to new customers?

**Dan:** In the beginning, it was the farmers' market, but now it's the website and social media. Those two engines—the website and the social media—are an absolute must. So the farmers' market, that's how we started, but it's very time-intensive. Now, yes, we're still

doing a farmers' market, but it's eight to noon on Saturdays. That a major difference—fewer hours and only on Saturdays. But we're finding that farmers more and more are not fussing with the farmers' market at all. They're just doing social media and websites.

———I do not think farmers' markets are the answer. I think more of the answer lies in home delivery and drop off. I would much rather go the home delivery route and deliver to the customer's front door.

**Jim:** What about distribution? You have multiple ways customers get their products. Can you talk about those?

**Dan:** Distribution has several components. There is the farmers' market and a Dayton pickup location, once a week, and we have our farm store. Customers can come to the farm store and shop just like at any store. That's number one. Number two is at Dayton. And that too is a pickup location, but it's also more than that. Customers can go there and see what we have, although we still require an order to be placed ahead of time. And then we have pickup locations where there is no regular presence of any kind of product, no inventory; rather, customers place their order, and then we drop it off for them to pick up. That happens in a variety of different ways. In some cases, customers just type in a code in order to gain access to a fridge in a small business. We also have a driver that delivers to residences that serve as pickup locations in Cincinnati and Columbus. And, there are families who form a driving co-op and drive up to Dayton every two weeks from Cincinnati. We are also learning about DoorDash.COM.

**Jim:** How has the home delivery worked out, has that been more and more accepted?

**Dan:** It is. I know there's always a little bit of a concern as far as the milk. So that, like right now, it's July, it's hot. And so, if it's 90 degrees outside, and you drop a gallon of milk inside the customer's igloo at their home, it might be one hour, two hours, three hours before they pick it up and put it in the fridge. So that can be an issue. Obviously, if the people are home, then it's not an issue, because it goes right from our cooler to their fridge. In January, obviously, this is not an issue. You drop it in their igloo and you're done. So it's seasonal. We

started home delivery back in January [2020] or so. Since then, it has really gotten momentum.

And since the COVID thing, people are more apt to prefer home delivery. There was kind of a surge in March and April [2020]. Now it's leveled off. I think the economy plays into it heavily now. Many customers understand the need to strengthen the immune system. But in the end, if they've been laid off or decreased in pay, then their motivation is less to get real food, even though they know they need real food. It remains to be seen how things are going to unfold next year, if the income level will be sustained. Because that determines whether or not people invest in real food.

**Jim:** What about home delivery?

Dan: We charge \$9 per order and delivery must be within a 10-mile radius of pickup location.

**Jim:** On an ongoing basis, what's the best way to communicate with your herdshare owners?

**Dan:** Of course, we do email. The texting thing is, I think, too personal; people want texting reserved for really urgent things in their close network. We do a fair amount of emailing, but then, within GrazeCart, we also have what's called Drip. Drip is a method of communication via email that is constantly talking to customer. It costs \$50 a month, which is not cheap. But at the same time, the scripture of "man does not live by bread alone" is a reality. The bread here, of course, is the milk, but the communication has to be there too. If the communication isn't there, then it doesn't matter how good the product is. If the customer is going to be uninformed, that's not good, so we find that maybe the milk is 50%, and the communication is 50%. And in that communication, there is also the convenience factor, so it's both communication and the convenience of that.

**Jim:** What additional methods have you had to use or used to draw people to your storefront?

**Dan:** For the storefront, of course, we're out here in Yorkshire Center, so the newspaper. But that is kind of a thing — it's all gone. The buyer we're trying to reach is digital, and the whole world has gone to digital with social media. It's a whole different strategy than it was in the beginning.

**Jim:** What about the drop-off location in downtown Dayton?

**Dan:** The customers' word of mouth is the majority of our advertising.

**Jim:** Why do some of your products in the store carry a "Not for sale" notation?

**Dan:** That is related to the herdshare model. We went through a whole episode with the state trying to shut us down in 2004, '05, and '06. If there isn't a "Not for sale" sticker on this product, it must be for sale. And so, all of our herdshare products now say "Not for sale," and that's our protection—our milk is not, as we say, a public product. It's a private product.

**Jim:** You've added some new crops. How do they fit into your business plan, and what are they?

**Dan:** As far as new crops, of course, there are sunflowers, and we're trying to get away from soy in our chicken feed. As Sally Fallon says, "There is no joy in soy. It is a ploy."

Sunflowers are high in good oil and even in protein. We find the hull on sunflowers is quite fibrous, though. We really don't want to use so many sunflowers in our chicken ration because of that fibrous hull. We really desire to de-hull the sunflowers and buy a de-huller that'll do that. We haven't done that yet, but we want to. So, in short, we're doing less soy and more sunflower, but nonetheless we still are using soy in our chicken feed.

**Jim:** Didn't you add spelt as well?

**Dan:** We've always done spelt. We have spelt cookies and spelt pizza crust and spelt bread. We've expanded that product line somewhat, but we've actually always had spelt.

**Jim:** Now, didn't you team up with a miller and a baker to turn your spelt into a finished product? Like a threesome working together to promote spelt products?

**Dan:** Right. That's been a great thing. We grow the spelt; Berry's Mill in Greenville, 20 miles from here, processes it, grinds it; and the bakehouse in Troy, which is about 40 minutes away, bakes it, and then we retail it. That has worked well.

**Jim:** When you consider adding additional raw milk farmers to your herd-share program, what are your expectations for their milk products and practices?

**Dan:** Without a doubt, they would have to follow the safety protocols of [rawmilk.institute.org](http://rawmilk.institute.org). That's an absolute must, and that's number one. If they pass that safety protocol then everything else is secondary, because the consumer wants to know that the product is safe. And to a certain extent, they want transparency. They don't just want to hear the farmer say it. It's really powerful, in our opinion, if they can go online and see what the test results from that farm have been.

**Jim:** I understand you started with five chickens. How has that progressed to today?

**Dan:** Right, at first we had both meat birds and layers, meaning eggs and meat. And now, we have a couple of thousand meat birds and 500 or so layers. That demand has increased for sure.

**Jim:** Do you let them all eat in the same part of the farm, or do different things for the layers versus the meat birds?

**Dan:** Different models. The layers, of course, are year-round, whereas the meat birds are 10 weeks. The habits of a meat bird are different than a layer, but the key difference is the time period, 10 weeks versus year-round. Layers are in the woods and meat birds on pasture.

**Jim:** I think I've heard you mention that heritage chickens are more difficult for the processors. Could you elaborate on that?

**Dan:** As far as meat birds, the white birds, the Cornish Cross, they have been heavily hybridized to accommodate processing ease. It's kind of like GMO corn, because whenever you make changes to the gene structure, then lots of properties are changed. The white Cornish birds are fat, dumb, and lazy. If you don't put their water or feed right in front of

them, they are liable to die. Whereas a Heritage bird behaves like a chicken: it is energetic and gets feed and water, and is sensitive to a hawk that might be flying above. A Cornish Rock is clueless.

What we eat affects the kind of people we are: If we eat dumb inputs, guess what? We're a dumb people. So, we ought to be eating chickens that have high energy, instead of chickens that have very low energy. But the problem with this is that with the Heritage bird, their meat clings to the bone tighter, so a processor will refuse to cut up a heritage bird. It has to either be processed whole or nothing. Whereas with a Cornish Cross, the meat is loosely attached because they have been hybridized, and you can get drums, and thighs, breast, and the rest. And that's what people want. They want the breast; they want the drum; they want the thighs; but the bird's characteristics are entirely different.

**Jim:** How do you get your Heritage birds processed?

**Dan:** By the same processor, but they will only do it as a whole bird, not cut up.

**Jim:** Have you been able to produce chickens without feeding them soy or corn?

**Dan:** I haven't found a way to do it. I mean, yes, you can do it without soy, but then you need something else. For example, I can bring in peas from Canada, but then that's a farm input that would increase the price of the chicken. I can do it, but it increases the price. And we find that while consumers want organic, they want pastured, but there's also a price that they want as well.

**Jim:** What are consumers looking for in chicken products? What is the demand?

**Dan:** Taste is number one, and number two is convenience, meaning that the customer may want drums, may want thighs, may want breasts, and that determines how they spend their dollar. They don't want a whole bird, but the whole bird has the greatest value/price. If we want nutrients, then we must change our mentalities.

**Jim:** What are consumers looking for in egg products?

**Dan:** Taste, color, texture—they want all the above. Taste, color, texture, and then being chemical-free comes in as well. I don't know. It's kind of like your customer wants it all. They want it without chemicals, they want the taste, they want the color, and they want the texture.

What can you do with unsold eggs?

**Dan:** Nothing. It's a problem. With milk, you can make cream and butter. We've tried many things with eggs, and it's very difficult.

**Jim:** How did you get into beef?

**Dan:** Customer demand. Customers wanted 100% grass-fed beef, Angus, chemical free beef, so we started raising that.

**Jim:** Do you raise your own, or do you bring in calves?

**Dan:** No. In the beginning, we bought the grass-fed, organic calves, and now we do our own, but I'm kind of going to a mixture of both.

**Jim:** What have been the challenges with beef?

**Dan:** Two-fold, the mamas, calving, you know. If they end up losing a calf because of difficulties in birthing, then you've fed that mama cow all year for nothing. Hauled the manure, fed it, housed it, all for nothing. That's one issue. The other issue is just that a steer can be rambunctious. You know, a two-year-old steer. There's always a certain element of safety, when loading it to go to market, to be harvested. That's a perpetual challenge.

**Jim:** I notice you have goats on the farm, how do they fit into the business plan?

**Dan:** We also do goat milk with a goat herd share program. We do a lot more cow milk than we do goat milk. But we do offer goat milk.

**Jim:** What are the issues involved in producing goat milk?

**Dan:** Just that it's a lot less milk. A Jersey cow gives four gallons of milk. A goat, at its peak, will do a gallon of milk. At non-peak it will do two quarts of milk. Truly, you're getting a lot less milk for a certain amount of overhead and time. But then, a goat is a lot smaller animal, so it can do a lot less damage. When a thousand-pound jersey steps on your foot, you know it. Whereas, if a hundred-pound goat steps on your foot, it's like "go on, get off." It's a safety thing.

**Jim:** Do you know of any dairy farmers who have been forced not to supply raw milk anymore?

**Dan:** We used to have a Jersey option and a Holstein option. The Holstein option was the Schmitmeyer Farm, and they started out with Organic Valley. And at some point, Organic Valley said, "You can't do this anymore. We're not going to let our suppliers also do the herd share thing." So, they switched to Horizon, and Horizon said, "No issues. You can do herd shares." And so that went on for several years, and then Horizon changed their policy. In this case, Horizon had all the power. They said, "Well, if you don't comply with this mandate, then we'll simply detach from you." At that point the farmer has to comply, because he only has two options right now for selling organic milk: Organic Valley, and that went away; and Horizon. And once Horizon went away, it meant the opportunity to do raw milk and also to sell to a company is gone. That ended that chapter for the Schmitmeyers.

**Jim:** Have you had other farmers contact you, interested in getting into raw milk?

**Dan:** There have been some that toyed with the idea, but it is all a business equation. It has to make sense to them. If the demand is there and they can move enough product, then they do it, but they're not convinced that the demand is there. They know that convenience plays a huge part. You're going to get customers that are convinced, that say, "Hey, I'll come to the farm to pick up my raw milk." But that is still a minority, not the majority. It can be location-dependent, too. The Double J Farm, for example, is in an area that is much more populated, and so, while they do some drop-offs, a lot of their customers pick up at the farm. It's not such an inconvenience for them to go to the farm. But for us, we're more remote.

I also think there's a lot of discernment going on the part of the consumer. We're in this era of virus fear. And you don't solve the problem by social distancing. You don't solve the problem by wearing a mask. You solve the problem by strengthening the immune system, and raw milk does that in the most powerful way. I think consumers know that, but either they're not convinced of the safety of it, or it isn't convenient enough. Mark McAfee, the Raw Milk Institute, is really bringing more focus and energy and confidence to the consumer about safety, and that's a great good. But it's also got to be convenient. Nothing is more convenient than home delivery; it's just that paying \$9 for delivery compared to the mentality of, "Okay, Amazon. I don't pay shipping. Shipping's free." One obvious strategy that we are considering is to go with that model and tuck the shipping cost into the product for home delivery. Maybe that is the right thing to do, because then, again, you've nailed the whole convenience thing. It doesn't get any more convenient than the milk arriving at your front door.

**Dan:** And likewise, that you've had the interest and the time to want to learn more about it, because really Jim, I'm confident that as we're looking into the future, the whole thing of building the immune system. God has the answer. It's called the cow.

The solution is there, it's for people to recognize it and then act on it, so again, you don't solve a problem by either a vaccine or a mask or staying away from people. That is not a long-term solution. The long-term solution must be to build the immune system, and that's best done with real food.

**Jim:** We're always so concerned about four-letter words, but I think the four-letter word, that solves the situation is, am I okay?

**Dan:** That's right. That's right, amen. Our life mission is to get that tremendous health-building immune system-building food to the customer, simply, conveniently, affordably. And it's a win, win, win, because it's a win for the soil, because it's the whole thing of regenerative farming and that's a whole discussion itself. It's a win for the customer, because they have their objective met of strengthening the health of the family, and it's a win for the farmer, because small farms then, instead of dying, they're thriving. That's what we need,

that three-legged stool that everybody wins, the soil (the environment) wins, the farmer wins and the customer wins. So, everybody wins. When everybody wins, it serves the common good.