



Encouraging Entrepreneurship

Small businesses bring multiple benefits to rural communities throughout the Northern Forest. They create good jobs, bolster the local economy, and can help create a sense of place – but it takes inspired and risk-tolerant entrepreneurs to make these important local establishments succeed.

The Northern Forest Center gathered four small business owners to share their experience and how communities can help support, attract, and retain local businesses. Panelists included **Tim Clough** of [Iron Furnace Brewery](#) in Franconia, NH; **Nathaniel Klein** of [Treeline Terrains](#) in Middlebury, VT; **James Munn** of [Black River Valley Natural](#) in Lyons Falls, NY; and **Beth Weisberger** of [Gneiss Spice](#) in Bethel, ME.



The four entrepreneurs agreed on the benefits of starting a business specifically in a rural location.

- **Starting a business is what may allow someone to move back home to raise a family.** Beth noted: “My business is online, I could really do it anywhere. But I feel very fortunate that I can do it in a place where I can get outside and really enjoy where I’m living.” No matter where you are geographically, having a unique product will make people curious.
- **People are really excited in a rural area to see new businesses start up and want to be supportive.** As Nathaniel said, “In a rural area, if a new restaurant opens up, it’s the talk of the town for a month. Everyone is thrilled to try it.”
- **Strong relationships with other local businesses can go a long way.** In rural areas, there is a sense of camaraderie rather than competition. James shared: “Having local competition does drive innovation and forces us to be more creative, which is not a bad thing. But we still help each other out.”
- **Being in a small town means that a business will be more successful if it is responsive to residents’ desires,** relies on local people and resources when possible, and gives back to the community in creative ways.
- **Supporting employees and creating a good work environment** is key to both retaining employees and attracting new ones, especially in a small town.

To overcome the challenges inherent to starting and operating small businesses, these entrepreneurs recommend:

- Connecting with regional and state-based business programs to access services such as business plan preparation and grant-writing support.
- Finding mentors who can provide guidance, perspectives, and resources as the business gets started. Chances are other businesses have struggled in the same way, so don't be afraid to ask for advice.
- Towns should work with new businesses directly or prepare how-to guides that help entrepreneurs navigate complicated process of legally establishing a business, like filing the right local and state permits, interpreting land use laws, and other local requirements they may need to comply with.

Running a business is never easy, but these four entrepreneurs made it clear that for the right person, it's worth the effort – both for the owner and the community.

“Launching a rural business checked all the boxes. It's a way for us to get involved in our community, help the economics of the area by providing meaningful employment, and – unlike our previous careers – it's we could do this as a family.”

James Munn, Black River Valley Natural

This positive mindset came through clearly from all the business owners we spoke with and is something that any aspiring entrepreneur – perhaps especially in the context of the Northern Forest – should heed.



The Community Learning Briefs summarize the Northern Forest Center's 2021-2023 "Building the New Forest Future" webinar series. The Encouraging Entrepreneurship webinar and others in this series are available [here](#). This project has been supported in part by USDA Rural Development.