



Big Picture Farm

PROFILE: Value Added Producer Grant Recipient

Townshend, VT

Grant Amount
\$124,280
Grant Period
2015–2017
Grant Summary

Grant was used to provide working capital to expand the processing, packaging, and promotion of farmstead goat milk truffles.

About the Grant Recipient

Luisa Conrad and Lucas Farrell operate this small hillside, animal-welfare approved goat dairy and farmstead confectionary. They are known for their goat's milk caramels, and make chocolate truffles, seasonal goat cheese, branded hats, t-shirts and linens, and offer experiences on their 100-acre farms located in a rural Vermont town with no zoning. 80% of their revenue comes from wholesale markets, 20% retail through our online store. Caramels and chocolates make up about 95% of their retail market. Cheese and merchandise accounts for the rest.



How is the public engaged with Big Picture Farm?

In 2017 and 2018, the owners purchased an additional piece of the farm and converted a farmhouse to an AirBnB rental. They host annual events such as "Open Farm Days" in the fall, and one in the spring called "Goat Hang-Out" where people spend time with the goat kids. They've had as many as 500 visitors a day for this event, and are trying to determine the best method for charging and ticketing for the event in the future.

During their first eight years in operation, the farmers had a hard time structuring how to welcome visitors. "It always sort of disrupted what was going on with our animals and workforce," Farrell said. "Now that we've figured out our systems,

we have stayed pretty consistent, and we're trying to increase how we bring people here in a structured, intimate, fuller experience."

"2018 has been an experiment year, and we've turned a new chapter where we feel comfortable bringing people here."

— Lucas Farrell

The farmers are staying away from brief tours, and are encouraging more in-depth experiences where people can come to get an idea of why the



farm is special, why the animals' lives are rich, and why it's good for the land and the world to have small-scale, sustainable agriculture. Guests have been respectful of the farm so far. "They derive joy from the farm, and we derive joy from sharing the farm with them," Farrell said.

IMPACT OF THE VAPG FUNDING

The VAPG had such an "incredible impact on our business," Farrell said. While things had been going well, they were interested in testing out a new product: hand-dipped chocolates, which they had been selling at farmers markets. Despite the success of this product, the business owners

knew they couldn't take on the risk of bringing the product to full scale on their own. "We've been doing everything organically as we've grown,

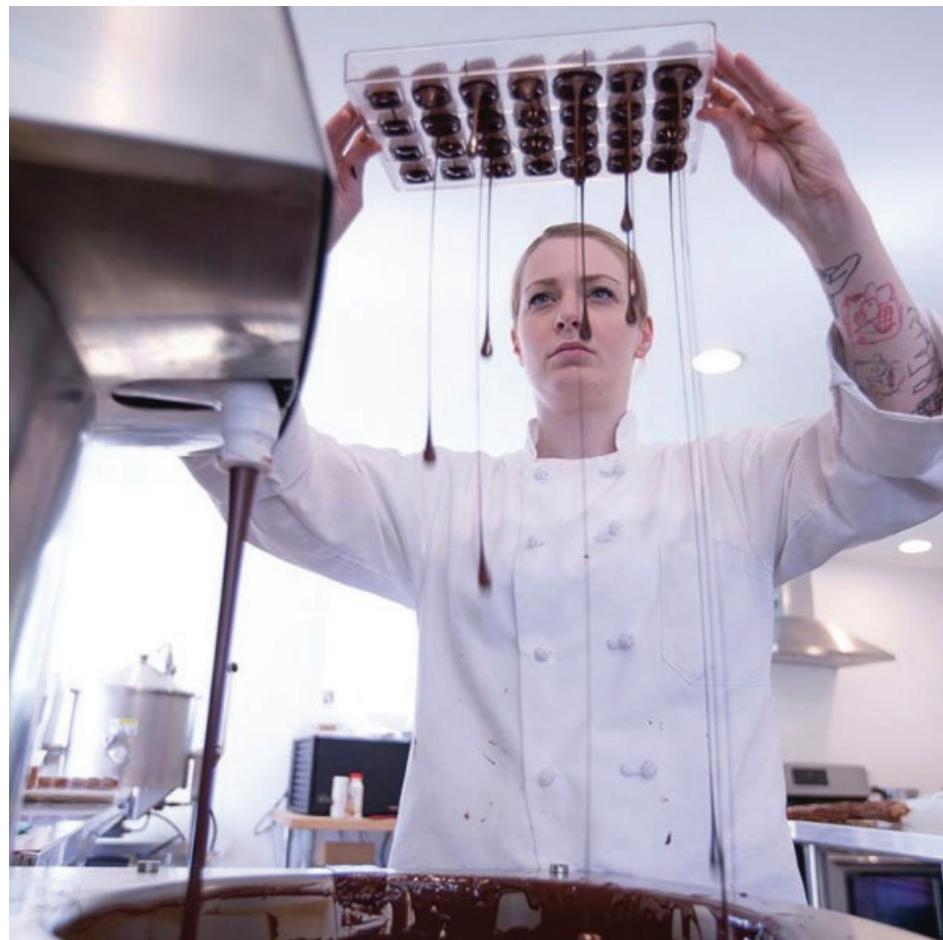
Big Picture Farm's VAPG paid for a lot of the investment one would make in a new product: development, salaries for skilled confectioners,

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so it's hard to just add a new product, especially when you've having a hard enough time going about your normal day, putting out a single product," Farrell said.

product development and packaging like inventory boxes, new labels and creating the marketing, printed materials, and going to trade shows. Because the VAPG was paying for



half of the expense of launching the product, their risk was lower across the board.

"The risk you take when the margins are already so small on a farmstead product is high, so it was extremely helpful. It's hard to overemphasize how important it was for our farm and our labor force."

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE IN APPLYING FOR AND IMPLEMENTING THE GRANT?

Big Picture Farm found the application process challenging. In addition to a business plan, it required filling out about an 80-

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page application. Figuring out the forms and piecing together every part was a challenge. Once the grant was awarded, the recordkeeping systems for reimbursements posed a steep learning curve. Farrell found a template for VAPG applicants from Oregon that was a helpful roadmap.

A more recent challenge has been transitioning back to the real costs of operating their business since the grant ended, and navigating the transition to the sustainable production of this product. Figuring out if it's going to pay for itself, and what the metrics are looking like is an ongoing process.





HAS THE VAPG HELPED YOU LEVERAGE OTHER FUNDING?

Working with their local bank, Big Picture Farm received a USDA Guaranteed Loan for the purchase of their farm. The process was a lot easier because they were in the system already, and could bring the business plan that they had assembled for the VAPG application. “It was helpful to have had VAPG when we went to the bank to try to convince them that they should fund

a farm. When it comes to farms, they couldn’t find a lot of comps, and that stalled us in our process of buying the farm,” Farrell said.

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THE VAPG PROGRAM TO OTHERS?

“In general, I feel so passionate about, and compelled to argue for the merits of value-added endeavors,” Farrell said. He would “absolutely” recommend the VAPG program to

others with a few caveats: he wished there was a little more outreach and assistance for applicants. They also advise prospective applicants that this isn’t the right grants program for a smaller farm that’s not going to hire employees.

Farrell also can’t emphasize enough that the product you’re applying for must be the product you really want to focus on. “Applicants need to be ready for that leap in production and marketing so they can take advantage of the grant opportunity,” he said.

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