



Episode 3

“The Rutgers Food Innovation Center”

Welcome to the third episode of the NJFPA Stradley Ronon Food Forum. In this episode, [Bill Mandia](#), Partner at [Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, LLP](#), speaks with [Nolan Lewin](#) a member of the [NJFPA Board](#) and Director of Operations for the [Rutgers Food Innovation Center](#). Bill and Nolan talk about the FIC and how its capabilities for both large and small companies give NJ food processors an advantage.

Guest Bio:



Nolan Lewin is a member of the NJFPA Board, contributing expertise and relationships to the success of the organization's work. Nolan joined the [Rutgers Food Innovation Center](#) in April 2018 as the Director of the Piscataway Facility. Shortly thereafter, he was assigned additional responsibilities as Director of Operations for both Bridgeton and Piscataway facilities. The Food Innovation Center at Rutgers University is a unique food business incubator and accelerator that is a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES). The Center supports established early stage entrepreneurs and existing food companies from concept to commercialization.

Nolan's previous experience includes several Plant Manager positions with Hanover Foods, Stay Fresh Foods and LiDestri Food and Drink. He has also owned retail markets, restaurants, catering facilities and cheese operations over the past 30 years. Of note, Nolan and his wife continue to own and operate a food truck.

Nolan is Food and Beverage HACCP certified (Seafood Lead Instructor) PCQI Lead Instructor, FSVP Lead Instructor and has performed in over 12 BRC, SQF and 3rd party audits. He holds a Bachelors of Arts degree from Rutgers in Communication and Information.

Listeners will hear:

- How the Rutgers FIC was started as a community investment in local economic development.
- How the pandemic first slowed operations, then bounced back busier than ever.
- What the Rutgers FIC has to offer startups: including ingredient analysis, packaging, sample runs and more WITHOUT taking any IP.
- What the Rutgers FIC has to offer large companies like Conagra: including testing new recipes, packaging, and processes without taking time and space away from manufacturing facilities.
- Nolan's predictions about what food innovation will look like over the coming year.

Edited Interview Transcript

Bill Mandia, Stradley Ronon [1:02]

Good afternoon, Nolan, and welcome to the Stradley Ronon New Jersey Food Processors Association podcast. Very excited to have you here today to talk about the work you're doing at the Rutgers Food Innovation Centers. So if you could, just to give our listeners some background, can you talk a little bit about your experience in the food industry and then we'll talk about some more specific stuff that you're doing and what the Food Innovation Center is doing at Rutgers.

Nolan Lewin, Rutgers Food Innovation Centers 1:26

Sure, thanks, Bill. My name is Nolan Lewin. I'm the acting executive director for the Rutgers Food Innovation Centers. There's actually two, one in Piscataway and one in Bridgeton. My background includes about 35 years of food and beverage industry experience from having owned my own retail market, restaurants, catering facilities, moving up to work with several large retailers up in northern New Jersey, the A. Seabra restaurant and supermarket group, building facilities for some of the company's commissaries. In the early 2000 teens, I worked for Hanover Foods out in Lancaster, Pennsylvania as a plant manager, where I helped create and produce ready to eat, ready to heat foods, soups, salads and entrees.

I also have expertise in newer technology called HPP. High pressure processing uses high pressure water and closed packaging to kill or reduce the pathogens that are inside that package. I also served as the plant manager for the LiDestri Food and Drink Company where we co pack the Bai beverage. Most of you probably remember that commercial Justin Timberlake and Christopher Walken Superbowl ad for the Bai drink. I was the plant manager during that scale up and commercialization to where they were sold to the Dr. Pepper / Snapple group in 2017. Then I came here to Rutgers in 2018 where I also serve as the Director of Operations for both facilities in Piscataway and Bridgeton in terms of operations and manufacturing.

Bill [3:09]

So I'm going to resist the urge to insert a Christopher Walken joke in here. But I would like to hear, and I think our listeners would like to hear, a little bit about what motivated you to make the transition from your work in the private industry to going to work at the Rutgers Food Innovation Centers.

Nolan [3:26]

That's a great question. And a lot of my friends and family asked me the same thing. I was also my own boss for many years, at the beginning of my career having owned several different companies and restaurants, as I mentioned. You reach a point in your career where you have this resource bank of information that you can pull from. When this particular position opened up, working for the Food Innovation Center, it was as though I spent my entire career prepping for this job, in terms of my ability to collaborate and work together and create and follow through on production. So it was a perfect fitting for me at this point in my career. I also didn't want to work 80 hour weeks that much anymore. That's kind of a drag sometimes. Most of the time I spent in the factory, I was on the factory floor. So it's 110 degrees and humid, 100% humidity, I was there on the floor with my team. And that's a lot of the reason that I had the successes that I've had in my career. I would never ask any of my people to do anything I wouldn't do myself.

Bill [4:39]

So the Rutgers Food Innovation Center does a lot of great things. And it's a pretty unique program here in New Jersey for smaller and startup businesses, but it also services a wide range of clients. So could you talk a little bit about what you do with the Food Innovation Center and what the Food Innovation Center offers to food industry participants.

Nolan [5:01]

The mission statement of the Food Innovation Center is one of economic development, growth, job creation, in the food and beverage as well as the ag space. This particular center in Bridgeton, was built on land donated by Cumberland County, one of the poorest counties in the state, but also very, very rich in agriculture. They were trying to develop some more business for the farmers and people that lived in this area by creating the Food Innovation Center in this particular region. And allowing companies, food manufacturers, whoever wanted to come in and develop a new food or beverage product within this geographic location.

We work with all different sizes, shapes, colors of people, companies, from very large companies who are actually looking to find a place to work quietly away from their main manufacturing facilities, to the mom and pop operations, who want to put grandma's recipe in the jar or Uncle Al's steak sauce or something like that. It's a very unique, capable facility that has a group of industry veterans, a small group of us who have been

in food manufacturing, marketing, food scientists, and we're able to come together and determine how best to help people create what they need to do.

Bill [6:34]

So I want to talk a little bit about working with early stage and startup companies. In particular, about what's going on right now in terms of how's the marketplace for startups, is the pandemic affecting that, and things of that nature and use that as a lead into a little more detailed discussion about things startups should be thinking about.

Nolan [6:58]

The pandemic certainly had a dramatic effect on literally everything that we do. A lot of the clients and projects we're working on, just dead stop for a period of time. But it also created an opportunity for a lot of people. Some of the restaurants that were shut down, who were agile enough to pivot around and say, hey, we've got some great products that we'd like to maybe put out into the retail market. The growth in frozen and, and packaged goods, people making food at home, cooking at home, creating a need for meal plans, meal kits. That all contributed to how busy we started to become very shortly after the pandemic really struck. So in March, we were definitely quiet, people just weren't sure. Was it going to be only be two weeks that we have to stay at home? But by the end of April, we had a lot of clients who were coming back to us or reaching out to us for the very first time saying, Hey, can you help us develop this particular line of products or develop a commercial variety of this drink or sauce whenever they happen to have.

Actually, over the past two or three months, it's been even busier. As people start to see an end to the pandemic, they're also seeing opportunities to enter the marketplace as people love the food and beverage space. There's just no slowing it down. People were so creative and so inventive. There is just a never ending river of ideas that are coming out.

Bill [8:36]

So what are some of the innovative things you see going on and that you anticipate are going to be coming on the back end, when we're all hopefully out of the pandemic?

Nolan [8:47]

Bill, it really ranges. From really simple ideas, simple sauces, what we're seeing a lot of is truly authentic varieties of things. So different ethnic, Southeast Asian, or African, or specific regional foods that usually people don't hear about. They have different types of ingredients, different types of spices, different flavor profiles, and with the Millennials and the Gen Z's and a lot of the younger generations that are much more willing to experiment with flavor profiles. This is an easy way to travel to India without getting on a plane and having to deal with the pandemic by buying a jar of Tikka Masala sauce, or Korma or one of the other specific things that they may have never tried before.

Bill [9:42]

Now, prior to the pandemic, there was a lot of talk in the industry about sustainability and farm to table type developments, companies that had real sort of niche offerings or products they were trying to put into the market. How have you seen that develop during the pandemic and how do you think it will play out on the backside of this,

Nolan [10:02]

I just did an interview with Asbury Park press about trends from TikTok. You guys have probably seen some videos of some pretty cool things like pancake cereal, or cloud bread and things like that. That kind of creativity has really always existed even before the pandemic, but we just saw more of it come out, I think. And they asked if I thought that was going to be sticking around as well. And I think the answer is yes. I think people are just really smart and creative and in general, they're always interested in trying new things. So it may not be as active as it is right now, with people still locked away at home. But as people start to venture out, we'll still see a lot of that creativity coming out. And with the ease of use of social media, like TikTok and Instagram, and all these other sharing websites, it's going to stay a viable part of what the food and beverage industry is.

Bill [11:04]

Great. And sticking with the topic of startup companies. Can you talk a little bit about startup companies? Number one, what kind of issues should they be thinking about right now in terms of developing their brands and their products? And then also how does the Food Innovation Center get involved? And how does it come into contact with startups? And what does it offer for a startup business?

Nolan [11:30]

So that's really the core of what we do. People who find out about us, a lot of people say, we're the best kept secret in New Jersey. But we are very visible, we are out there in the public eye, we participate. And when there were food shows and conventions and so forth, we make our presence known. But a lot of our clients come from word of mouth, and for obvious reasons. We got a lot of exposure, when three and a half years ago, Impossible Foods launched from the Bridgeton site. And ever since then, it's been mentioned that they started here in Bridgeton, with their food service, commercialization process, and a lot of people call us up because of that exposure.

But the way that most people start is very simply. If they have a concept or idea or recipe and it seems like something that would work within the confines of our abilities and the equipment that we have here. We're happy to bring them in, work in the lab, and test on their recipe development. We look at their ingredients, we look at alternate ingredients. What's really, really hot right now is plant based everything. So we had a lot of calls to look into that. Our niche is really high acid acidified foods, like tomato sauces, barbecue sauces, soups, teas, things like that. And as long as it meets a certain criteria, and we're able to put it in a package, whether it's a bottle or a cup with a film seal, we're able to at least give them the prototypes that they need to get out into the market. Either go to,

right now it's foreign markets, mostly, but pre pandemic, they would go and do samples at Whole Foods or Costco or places like that if they can get in. And now it's turning into more direct to consumer sales online. And that's gained quite a bit of ground, people are more willing to take chances on buying food that way from people that come referred to them generally through friends and family. We help them develop those prototypes, get their samples out.

And if they have proof of concept, that's what they need. By being able to sell to more than their friends and family and more than once, and we can then get them to the next initial stage. We take baby steps here with getting them to a couple 100 units or maybe a couple 1000 units. And then at that point, when they're really a brand, and they've started to sell a lot of their products, we will recommend that they go to a co-packer co-manufacturer or build their own facilities which we can help them do as well.

Bill [14:24]

So my next question I'm going to ask is a little bit self interested because I've got an 11 year old, a nine year old and a six year old who during the pandemic have become aspiring chefs. We have a routine here, where every either Saturday or Sunday, one of them looks through some cookbooks and selects a recipe. They make dinner with some assistance from my wife and they also do a dessert. So what will your advice be? I'm actually joking. I'm looking for a more mature audience than that. But what would your advice be to people who are looking to get into the food industry as a startup in terms of what things should they be thinking about especially in the current environment,

Nolan [15:03]

One of the things I tell most of the clients who call up on an initial call or send me an email is, what is your point of difference? What makes your product stand out from the hundreds of others that are out there. As you and the audience may know, the failure rate for new food and drink introductions is almost 90%. And that's really because people just don't do a lot of their own homework and a lot of their own research, or pay somebody to help them figure out what people are really looking for and who their target is. If you don't know who you're trying to sell to? You've now just compounded the difficulty level on getting your product out into the market. And a lot of people say, Well, I want to sell to everyone. And I say, that's great. But not all products are aimed at all generations of people. And it's an even tougher environment now, post pandemic, let's call it because there's such a diversity of products that are being made.

Whether it's vegan, better for you, supplemental, fat free, better than, free from 30 products. It's just so many variables that are out there, the best way is to differentiate what you're doing. What's the story behind it, what are the ingredients, if you're going to make a tomato sauce, don't make a tomato marinara sauce, from the ingredients that everybody else is making it from. Find a way to differentiate. Better yet find a different kind of sauce to make, maybe there's an ethnic sauce that runs in your family or

whatever. But you're up against a really, really tough battle, uphill battle. If you're one of 100 items on the shelf and supermarket.

Bill [16:53]

One of the things that we come across, not infrequently in our food and beverage industry practice with startup or new entities are issues involving intellectual property. Whether it be trademark, patented process, or just simply how do I protect my recipe or internal process as a trade secret. So is that something that the Food Innovation Center offers some help with and if so how?

Nolan [17:22]

Again, one of the unique features of the Food Innovation Centers is that we're not allowed to take any IP. We are strictly prohibited from doing that in the food and beverage, and the food centers. For that reason, a lot of clients come to us because there are other universities out there who will take IP. And if you can avoid giving away any part of your company, it's really in your favor.

I'm sure a lot of people have watched shark tank and understand the ramifications of your offering 5% of your equity, and having to give away 50%. So we're not even allowed to own any ingredients or packaging for clients. It's strictly owned by them. When it comes into this building, it's by their order we receive on their behalf, and we store it on a pallet on their behalf. But once they're done, It all belongs to them and we ship it out once they're finished here.

Bill [18:21]

I think that's a really great feature of the Rutgers Center. Because we've seen some others around the country who do have good programs, but there is an IP sharing or surrender that's associated with that, that's not always advantageous. I do think startups in my experience are much more attuned to that. Because as you know, in food, your brand is everything, your brand and the quality of your food. So I think people are becoming more attuned to it. But it's a huge issue for a startup to be thinking about, because there's so much competition out there. And in similar product lines.

So I want to pivot a little bit. I know a lot of the work is done with startups, but I want to talk about some of the work you may do with more mature companies that are further in their development, some of whom may even be larger in size. If they're looking to bring or develop a specific product here in New Jersey, how does that process work? And what do you offer at the Food Innovation Center to assist those kind of companies?

Nolan [19:24]

That's a great question because we do get a lot of that as well. We've worked with some of the largest companies in the world. Conagra was a company that actually had a pilot plant in our Piscataway location. They actually bought in some of their iconic brands like Birdseye vegetables and Duncan Hines and the salad dressing and they did some work

in that on pilot scale equipment. So that they wouldn't have to take line time away from their manufacturing facilities. They were able to develop new variations. Maybe they took phosphates out of the product or added an emulsifier in to help it from separating. And they were able to do that under the umbrella of Rutgers because we are USDA and FDA certified facilities, both in Piscataway and, and Bridgeton.

We have a team of people who can offer that oversight and make sure that they're producing in a way that meets all those requirements. Not that they don't know how to do that, but sometimes you just need somebody looking over your shoulder to make sure that you're doing things the right way. And they also have the ability to work in an environment where they weren't being rushed to move through new product development.

Bill [20:49]

And another big issue, we talked a little bit about brand and the importance of quality. Wrapped up into that, and it's absolutely essential, is food safety and safety associated with production of food, distribution of food, worker safety, all those kinds of things. So can you talk a little bit about what the Food Innovation Center does on those fronts with respect to the companies it works with.

Nolan [21:11]

As a plant manager, when I worked out on the floors in the companies that I worked for, safety was a number one priority. And that's unusual to hear from a plant manager, because typically, it's production. How many units did you get out today? How many did you miss, and how you're going to make it up? So for me, it was a little bit of a battle sometimes to fight with the owners of the companies, both family owned companies that I worked for, and let them know that without that safety factor, without worrying about all the components of what could ultimately stop the line completely for more than just an hour, but for days or weeks was one that I was able to actually implement.

So I convinced the owners that by implementing these super vigilant safety regulations and rules following the guidelines, not only from OSHA, but from a food and food defense safety perspective. For instance, my quality assurance, people were all told, and this is again, very unusual to have a plant manager tell his quality person, you have the authority to stop the line, if you see anything that's wrong. Stopping a line is like pulling the emergency brake on a train. You don't do it unless there's somebody lying in the middle of the tracks really. But I gave them that authority, I empowered them to understand how important food safety was. And that anytime they saw an issue, they should stop and make the correction. Not put a bandaid over it, but implement a change for the better that would ultimately help in creating a better atmosphere. Here with the Food Innovation Center, one of our biggest channels that we have is training in food safety in food defense. Donna Schaffner, Mellonie O'Neill, two of my quality people are very well known in the industry. Actually, Donna Schaffner is one of only 25 train the trainers in the world. So she actually trains USDA and FDA auditors, and inspectors.

We've done a lot of training for state and local health agencies. And we teach certified programs in all the FSMA regulations, Food Safety Modernization Act, programs have been out since 2011. I have to be a lead instructor in three of those as well. But anything from PCQI, where we train the qualified individuals to understand all the regulatory compliance that they need to know, to the latest release of intentional adulteration, how to ensure that someone in your own facility isn't poisoning, or somehow altering the food and safety of the products that you're making.

Bill [24:07]

One of the things that's been a big issue during the pandemic on the safety front, obviously has been transmissibility of COVID-19 particularly for the labor force. There's been a lot of well publicized events that have taken place at different production facilities and the like. Fortunately, through the pandemic, food was not a means of transmitting the virus. But I am curious, on the back end of the pandemic, when it's over, do you have any sense as to what some of the priorities may be on the regulatory side with respect to safety and some of those issues and I'm not talking about worker safety per se, but particularly associated with food safety.

Nolan [24:51]

Thankfully, the regulatory components of what we've had to go through over the past 10 years have really addressed all of the things that a COVID would have made us address. And thankfully, COVID is not transmitted on any food, that's been proven. So just following all the guidelines that are already in place, are really all that we need to do. There are still many more serious outbreaks that happened as a result of the things that we've been fighting for many, many years like E. coli and salmonella and pathogens that can make people sick or kill them. Thankfully, COVID is not one of them.

Bill [25:36]

So do you see some of the well publicized events surrounding workers who have gotten ill due to COVID and the conditions they've been working under having any impact on labor regulations, after the pandemic is over?

Nolan [25:50]

That's a really good question too. What we have seen, especially in the larger food processing facilities, like the meat packers, we've seen that transition. Where they were working shoulder to shoulder on the line, they really tried to create separations with physical barriers, whether it's plastic curtains, or trying to spread them out over a larger area which isn't always possible in those types of lines. But in general, in a regular food factory or food production facility, just by ensuring that there is some sort of CDC guidelines being followed.

Here at the Food Innovation Center, we follow the guidelines, as far as temperature checks when people come into the building, we require them to wear masks at all times when they're in the building, face shields if necessary too. At this stage, all of the

Rutgers employees are being tested weekly, by the university. And we do ask that any visitors to the facility also have had a negative COVID test within the most recent five days to their visit. So we do ask for that, and knock on wood, we've been fortunate here in Bridgeton. We've been able to avoid having any of our staff infected. In Piscataway, we did have two of our employees that came down with COVID. But that was a family transmission from someone else within their families. So both facilities have been very safe as far as keeping that to absolute minimum, and ensuring that people who are in the facility are following those guidelines.

Bill [27:43]

Another big topic that has come up as people start to prognosticate about what the business world will look like after the pandemic, is increased prevalence potentially of work from home, reduced business travel. These are things that traditionally have leaned towards people eating out at restaurants. Whether it's I'm in the office over in the city, and I'm going to go grab lunch with some colleagues as a pretty regular part of my routine, or I have to travel for work or a meeting or something like that. So I'm going to eat out at restaurants while I'm out of town. How do you see that potentially playing out? And are you seeing companies start to adjust and prepare themselves for the fact that eat at home may become much more prevalent? And are you seeing new offerings, a lot of new offerings around that?

Nolan [28:35]

Absolutely the prevalence of eat at home, takeout. Everything from ghost kitchens, which is a relatively new term some people may or may not be familiar with, rather than having a restaurant where you sit down at a table and have a waiter or waitress come over, take your order, bring you food, these ghost kitchens appeared. Some of them share facilities with multiple restaurants, depending on the time of the day that they're operating, and what they're doing. And it's strictly order online, have Uber Eats or GrubHub or somebody pick it up and deliver it to you, or come by and pick it up on a rack. So it's all touchless, you've already pre paid the meal. And that's very popular, we see a lot of that growing. And and with good reason, it works. If you don't have a smartphone, you're lost in today's culture. So it's really important to have that capability. And those that do fully take care of that. And I have three kids, 32, 26 and a 19 year old and I can tell you that ordering a bottle of ginger beer and having it show up the next day from Amazon. Not even a secondary thought. It's like yeah, I bought it on Amazon. It was here in a day. It's really becoming more of a take out, people picking up, doing that thing.

When the restaurants do begin to reopen up again, fuller capacities, I think we'll see a big return to them. A lot of them will have been long gone. They just couldn't hold out for the year plus that it took to overcome this challenge. So, by virtue of having a little bit less competition, I think you're going to see a really big resurgence in the restaurants that were able to survive. People coming back out to the restaurants, I think people are going to continue to wear masks for a very long time, certainly towards the end of this year, maybe into next at restaurants. Whenever they're going out, it's going to recover, it's

going to take a long time. People are still going to be weary and leary of what the exposures are going to be.

Bill [30:54]

You hit on another thing here, that's a huge topic, which is mobile food delivery. It's just taken off. It was becoming obviously a big thing before the pandemic. It has accelerated it, not surprisingly, at a tremendous rate. And there's some great local companies like goPuff and some others who were already very active in that space, who I think have been a lifesaver for a lot of people during the pandemic. How do you see that playing out going forward? Do you expect people will continue to rely on a mobile delivery service, or you think they'll start to go back out to the supermarkets and convenience stores and things like that, once the pandemic is over?

Nolan [31:38]

I think there'll be a little bit of a slowdown and consolidation of those services, the Instacart, and the delivery services for supermarkets, especially. It's a convenience factor. And I think it certainly works well for a lot of people. Certainly people who are immunocompromised, who have a concern about being exposed. I was listening to NPR the other day, and they were talking about how the influenza occurrences this past winter is virtually zero. I don't know if that's true, or people are just afraid to say they had the flu. But, certainly things are capable of changing and I think the delivery service will continue to be there.

I think there'll be a consolidation into larger companies, or maybe more localized companies specialize. I think right now what we have is everybody in the world delivering, including Lyft and Uber drivers. Again, once people start to go back out, and they start to need rides to the theater, does the Uber driver make two bucks on delivering food? Or does he make 10 bucks on driving somebody to the theater? And I think that's easy to see what the choice is going to be.

Bill [33:03]

Yes, I would agree with you on that. I think that certainly some of the overflow there for Lyft and Uber, I think we'll see a shift once people have a need for just basic transportation services. So I guess kind of as an overall question, what advice do you have for companies today to be thinking about in terms of, I'll put in air quotes, "the new normal," that will be on the horizon, hopefully soon?

Nolan [33:30]

Well, I think what we've learned is a really valuable lesson. And that is that as Americans, we're pretty resilient and we're pretty agile. We're able to pivot and figure out new ways to do things. I think there's brand new business that's up and coming, look at all the things that worked during the pandemic, and figure out what's going to be the best combination of things for you to try in your businesses. And don't be afraid to change. Years ago, when I was a kid, I remember there being like, three brands of cereal or

something, whatever you pick, it wasn't 35 brands. It was corn flakes and Cheerios, and whatever else there was. Now, you can be specialized, and still appeal to the general audience.

Most people are creating what I call premium or super premium products. That's a lot of what we do here at the Food Innovation Center. Because it just doesn't pay to try and compete against the Walmart brand of tomato sauce, you're never going to be able to compete. So if you're going to create something, make it the best that you can. And it's okay to charge for something that's really, really good, but make sure it's really, really good.

Bill [35:01]

So as a wrap up conversation to kind of bring our discussion to an end, and we've talked a lot, about all the great ways that the Food Innovation Center can help different companies. Can you just give the listeners a sense as to what's the process? If somebody wants to engage with the food processors, how did they go about doing that? I know that you said there's an initial reach out, but I think it would be helpful for people to understand what sort of happens next in terms of how the two may work together.

Nolan [35:34]

For the Food Innovation Center, to work with us, I strongly recommend that people go to our website, [<https://foodinnovation.rutgers.edu/>] read through the things that we do, that we're capable of. You get a chance to look at the staff, look at the people who are here. And again, we're a group of industry experts, veterans who are here to help, that's our job, it's our function. It's not just for us to make something and give it to you and tell you 'have a nice day, good luck.' A lot of times, what I do, and some of my other staff does is we actually talk people out of their projects, because sometimes they're just not a good idea. Or it's been tried so many times, it's not worth another try. And quite frankly, a lot of people, you know, they're willing to mortgage their houses and their kids' education on it and that's not a good idea.

There is science behind creating food and beverage, you have to believe in that. And it's not just a matter of throwing things in a jar and thinking that's going to sell, there's an expense that goes with it. It costs a couple thousand dollars to figure out if the product is really something that's viable, and worth putting out into the market. So I would say, think about what you want to do, have a point of difference for the product that you want. And let us help you try and make a small amount to start, see if there's proof of concept there. And then go a step at a time.

Some people call us up and they're like, I want to get right to a co packer. Well, first of all, they're not going to want to take you because they want 10,000 of whatever you're making. And you don't want to spend that much money on an initial run. Make a couple dozen, make 100, make 200 and take it to the local stores and farmers markets and see how people like it. Are they coming back and asking for it again? And are they willing to

pay \$10 or \$12 for something that they could buy for two or three or four, and *then* you decide and determine that what you have is the beginning of a brand.

Bill [37:47]

Well Nolan thank you so much for your time today. This was a great conversation. And thank you and your colleagues at the Food Innovation Center for everything you do for companies in New Jersey. It's a really great program that you've run top notch and I really appreciate you and I think our listeners value you sharing your insights with us today. Thanks.

Nolan [38:09]

Thank you, Bill. I appreciate it.

On behalf of the New Jersey Food Processors Association, we thank you for listening to this episode of The NJFPA Stradley Ronon Food Forum. For more information, visit us at www.njfoodprocessors.org and if you have an idea for a future podcast, please email us at help@njfoodprocessors.org.

Thank you all for your support of the New Jersey Food Processors Association.