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In the Kitchen with Wise Butter

Nashville food entrepreneur is
changing butter for the better

By MAKAYLA HEVERETT



For years, when Wendy French Barrett got home from working day jobs as an English teacher, administrative assistant, and then as a human resources specialist, her day would really begin. She'd melt away the day while laboring in her apartment kitchen. With each new flavor or experiment she created, she would wipe her hands off on her apron and grab a pen to jot down the new recipe or idea. Slowly, her passion for cooking grew and her small notes became a binder of recipes.

Today, Wendy is looking back at one year of owning and operating Wise Butter, her line of small-batch blended butters she makes right here in Nashville.

"This has been my dream," says Wendy. "Every day that I get to wake up and know this is my job, I am happy." Wendy knew she wasn't fulfilled by her 9 to 5 jobs. As much as she loved her co-workers, she was always in a hurry to get home and express her creativity while doing something she loved. One weekend in 2010, a kitchen experiment led her to make butter from scratch and she started adding in different flavors. She immediately became fixated on the butter-making process and noticed a difference in her recipes using the butter. This is when she had an idea that became Wise Butter.

"I've always been an academic, but this was the first time in my life I made something with my hands," says Wendy. "It became very therapeutic."

She wanted to share her creation with others, but she quickly found that Tennessee has a number of rules and regulations when it comes to making and selling butter. These restrictions put her ultimate dream of making butter from scratch on hold, but fortunately, it didn't stop her from finding creative ways to pursue her passion. She turned toward making flavored butters by blending specialty butter with fresh, local ingredients.

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After several years of creating recipes and doing research in her own kitchen, in April of 2015 Wendy signed up for a food entrepreneur class by Co.Starters. “It really empowered me to take [my idea] forward,” says Wendy.

Through networking at this class, she met Laura Wilson, owner and kitchen manager at Citizens Kitchen, a community commercial kitchen space for food entrepreneurs, where Wendy currently makes Wise Butter products.

Wendy credits Wilson for much of her success. Wilson helped with the business planning aspect, and hopes to help Wendy with her ultimate goal: to get the kitchen machinery necessary to make butter from scratch in the future.

“She’s the kitchen mom, even though she’s not nearly old enough to be my mom!” Wendy says of Wilson.

Wendy’s artisan process for each Wise Butter product begins with specialty European plugrá, an 82 percent butterfat base, with which she blends locally-sourced, seasonal ingredients for flavor.

Creating mouthwatering flavors is Wendy’s specialty. She spends hours reading cookbooks like novels to heighten her creativity in the kitchen. Then, she labors over testing and tasting new, seasonal flavors every month. Always creative and never shy, Wendy’s creations range from sweet to savory and can sometimes surprise you—she is even considering a dill-flavored butter.

Wendy typically has five or six recipe ‘drafts’ before launching a flavor that she is proud of giving top rank. Her year-round flavors include Roasted Garlic Basil, Chipotle, Dark Wildflower Honey, and Vegan with Smoked Salt. The current seasonal flavors are Strawberry Balsamic and Salted Caramel Peach (available in June).

If you happen to run into Wendy at a local farmer’s market, you will get the chance to sample her available flavors, five at any given

time. Wendy prides herself in opening doors to a different world of flavors for many. She says her butters can take toast from ordinary to extraordinary, make the best mac and cheese, are a great base sauce, and are great on steak.

“I use the Chipotle butter on everything!” says Wendy. “We put it on our steak, sweet potatoes, and oatmeal. We’re adventurous!”

She says the Roasted Garlic Basil flavor has historically been her best seller, but Lemon Rosemary Butter is a close second.

Wendy says people enjoy Wise Butter because they like to know who is preparing it and that there is good energy and care going into each package.

“Personal connection inspires happiness when eating a product and knowing who made it and knowing who you are supporting,” says Wendy, adding, “Nashville is the city of dreamers, a community of creative people.”

But this phenomenon between community and product isn’t new.

“My Paw Paw influenced me to seek out good food,” remembers Wendy. “On the weekends we would drive out to Amish farmers and he would tell me how food and butter didn’t taste as good as it used to. He always went the extra mile for good food.”

Wise Butter is sold in four-ounce, compostable tubs for \$8 each, or three for \$20. You can grab a tub at the Green Door Gourmet, Lazzaroli Pasta, Tin Wings, Produce Place, Herban Market, and around Nashville at several farmer’s markets and events (you’ll be sure to see her at the Batch and Bushel show again next year).

For more information about Wise Butter and upcoming farmer’s markets visit www.wisebutternashville.com.

“It has been an overwhelmingly positive first year of business. People really love butter!” 🍷



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