

# SOUTHERN CRAFT CREAMERY

*In Florida, ice cream is a catalyst for change*

*by Ashley Melzer*



FIVE MORNINGS A WEEK, Lauren O'Bryan picks up milk at 4:30 from Cindale Farms, the dairy her family owns and operates in the North Florida town of Marianna. She then drives the milk to her kitchen and starts churning cream.

Lauren's new enterprise, Southern Craft Creamery, makes good use of local produce and regional farms. She works a long day, dreaming up flavors while cooking down blackberries or swirling in batches of Tupelo honey, getting home by 10 in the evening if she's lucky. Fourteen flavors are now in rotation each week. When she's not in the kitchen, Lauren makes delivery runs from Tallahassee to Rosemary Beach and back again.

The way Lauren and her husband Zach, also a North Florida native, figure it, Marianna, in the heart of the Panhandle, has the makings of a local food magnet. Right now, however, the town lacks some of the awareness and enterprise of larger locales.

Lauren and Zach moved back to Marianna to make a difference. It wasn't an easy choice. After living in college towns where local food is exalted, Marianna offered stark contrasts. Farmland is abundant here, but the economy is dominated by Walmart and dollar stores. A new farmers market in the center of town shows promise, but there's little focus on the benefits of buying green, local, or independent.

Southern Craft Creamery is a direct attempt to fill those voids. To accomplish their goals, Lauren and Zach sold their home in Athens, Georgia, where they'd moved after Zach retired from the Marine Corps; gave up on the idea of regular paychecks; and buckled down for a year of product development.

To that end, Lauren completed short ice cream courses at the University of Wisconsin and Penn State. But the industrial production methods taught at those programs weren't the right fit for her mission. Sugar-heavy recipes didn't showcase her parents' milk. Typical grocery-store flavors wouldn't help start the conversations about regional tastes she hoped to have with customers.

"If we can talk to them about our local milk and we can talk to them about the art that goes into making our ice cream," says Lauren, "we also need to talk to them about what else is available here." Lauren hopes a spoonful of ice cream can just as easily start a conversation about cow breeds as one about the farmer with the tastiest blackberries in the area.

# A MIDDLE TENNESSEE MELTING POT

Southern Craft Creamery flavors telegraph the local bounty. Her sweet cream base blossoms with Tupelo honey, harvested down the road in Calhoun County. The strawberries she brightens with balsamic vinegar are harvested at K&S Farms in Live Oak. The citrus that stars in her satsuma ginger sorbet is grown right in Jackson County at Cherokee Farms.

The quality of Lauren's products reflects the values she developed growing up on a farm. "Food has always been the thing that you share with people because it was really all you had to offer and doing it well just meant you cared that much more," she says. "I think that's where I get that gratification that I have when people enjoy the ice cream. It makes me feel like I did something for them." 🍷

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*PHOTOS, PAGE 14 and BELOW by Lauren O'Bryan.*



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