

Crafting A Full-Time Kettle Corn Business



An Interview With Mike Gohn
From
Big Mike's Kettle Corn

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The Author

[Eric Bickernicks](#) is the owner of [Velma's Kettle Corn](#) of Massachusetts. He's been making kettle corn for over 12 years. He's helped many kettle corn business owners get their start with his [online video training course](#).



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Eric: With me today is Michael Gohn of [Big Mike's Kettle Corn](#) in Michigan. He bought my kettle corn course a while ago and was motivated to get into the biz.

Mike: Yeah. So I found myself working about six part time jobs, just going crazy. Not getting anywhere. A friend of mine started doing a kettle corn thing and I thought he was kind of crazy. I listened to some of the numbers he was saying and I did a Google search and found your book and devoured that in a night. I did all kinds of research on YouTube and other sites and pretty much followed your directions. Our setup is a little different, little more efficient. That book is what got us going. Our initial plan was for me to build the business for five years and get my wife out of her job. I probably dumped \$15,000 into my startup. I had it paid back in two months.

Eric: Wow.

Mike: Then my wife got so tired of corporate America that she informed me on her birthday that she quit. I'm like, well, I guess our numbers better work. We had her kettle paid off in three months. Now every Saturday, we double up and come home with some good money.

Eric: I walked away from a corporate job, doing corporate video work. Well past six figures. My thing is, I wanted to be my own boss. And it's funny that I was even qualified to work there; I didn't have a degree. I just knew my stuff. When I left, they were really shaking their heads. I just said, "Sorry, I just can't work here anymore." I had to commute two hours a day. I was doing both--kettle corn and a corporate job, and then ultimately just kettle corn.

Mike: I can't even think about going back anymore. Even on the hard days. We had a storm chase us out of a Saturday, and I was going to make some good money, probably \$1,400 or \$1,500. I got about halfway through and thought, "Man, if I had a regular job, I'd still be getting my full paycheck." But then my wife went to a big event and came home with \$3,700 in one day!



Eric: So going back - what kind of jobs did you do before you got into kettle corn? A lot of people are tripped up with the entrepreneur thing. They're sort of like, "Well, there's no assurances." Well, yeah. There's no guarantee you'll get health insurance or whatever. You have this job because you're your own boss.

Mike: Part of the reason I was doing six part time jobs was because nobody wanted to pay for health insurance. They only wanted to give me 20 hours a week. I got back from one where the year before I was hitting all their numbers and making everybody happy. Next year was a down year. "Oh, we don't need you." I was tired of being treated like that. I was a manager in a retail store. They said, "We're going to train you to be a district manager." I'm tired of it. They're never gonna promote me, so I quit.

Eric: What is nice about the kettle corn biz—there's no up and down years. It's food; people just want their thing. And no matter how bad the economy is, they keep buying kettle corn.

Mike: In one market that we're allowed to do, we can take food stamp tokens.

Eric: Those are good, if you can do that!

Mike: They can bring in their food stamp card and they get wooden tokens and we can take them in. We did almost \$3,000 in food stamps this year.

Eric: Yeah, those customers! There's a town, New Bedford, where I set up. It was really close to me and they had a lot of



people. Most events I can't take food stamps, but this one I did. They converted the food stamps to tokens and I was able to take them. It was the greatest gig! You hope you can find those places. Problem was, the health department killed me. They wanted \$600 a year. I was really bummed that I wasn't able to do that market just for that reason.

Mike: Kettle corn is not the staple vegetables or bread that they need every week.

Eric: Right! Which they should be eating, but....

Mike: If we do two months in a row at a Wal-Mart parking lot, the second month our sales are way down. It's not the staple food. And everyone kind of says, "Oh, I want to lose weight. This is kettle corn, and you're making me addicted." You want a location where you can have the novelty. I go to this farmer's market once a month, so the novelty is there.

Eric: There's one town, Newton, which is a very high-end town. It's right near Boston. *I thought I had a great setup there* with these rich people. Every single house is a million dollar house. All the high tech people live in Newton. They're all skinny and they're healthy. I found that I didn't do as well. Most people just took their samples and left. I think I was paying \$50 - \$75 a day to be there. I was surprised that I couldn't make it work in a very high end town - it's crack corn!



Mike: We are in a rich place like that and mostly they would buy the small bag. That was perceived as the healthiest thing, but at a Wal-Mart, they love eating!

Eric: That's why I wanted to go to *New Bedford*, which is a very blue collar town, I would have done well there. With my customers it's their comfort food. They're like, "We don't care." I go, "Here you go, have another."

Mike: I like being there consistently; that's my nature. I learned from your videos

that you need to show up every time. In one video where there was you and three other tents, you still did \$300 that day. We have people that will show up in the rain just to come get their kettle corn. If you don't show up, they're going to say, "Well, he doesn't care about me; why should I go to him?"

Eric: Oh definitely. They will just park their car, sprint out of the door while it's raining. I throw them a bag and they run back to their car. I do this all day. The farmers are sitting there thinking, "Hold on, no one is running out of their car to grab a zucchini".

Mike: Right.

Eric: So basically, you never really were an entrepreneur, per say. You just had a regular job up until the time you got into this business.

Mike: I would say I had entrepreneurial tendencies and a lot of creative, process and system thinking that's more natural to me. At a lot of the places I worked, I would spot obvious things that I could do better. It would drive me nuts, so I wouldn't like it. But this business really has given me an outlet to get paid for my own creativity and my own system building—my own whatever.

Eric: Yeah, I'm right with you on that one. My own little boss. I feel good about it.

Mike: I just have a better self-image and self esteem because I'm proud of myself.

Eric: It's a stubbornly lone wolf kind of thing. But that's just who I am.

Mike: I said, "You know what? I'm 50 years old. Fired up now." I thought I'd work and and my wife would have her salary for five years. Well, we built it up. She got out of her job.

Eric: So you've actually done now quite well. You've only been doing this for two years. You saw my train-



ing course online two years ago?

Mike: Well we've been doing it two and a half years. I started watching your stuff in February and probably started in July. It took a while to get my health plan and research trailers, generators, machines—everything. The dialogue back and forth between me and the health department probably took a month and a half.

Eric: So you're basically self-sufficient now. You're doing this full time and it only took you two years to get to this point. You've paid off your equipment?

Mike: Yeah. The first tent got paid off in about two and a half months. The second tent was paid off in three months.

Eric: Two tents, I forgot to mention that. You're thinking about a third?

Mike: I actually have been talking to a guy who lost his job. I said I could franchise him; it wouldn't take a lot of his money. I wanted him to be free, but I don't want to deal with the franchise thing. I wanted him to have his own business. I'm turning down events now. I could easily run a third tent every weekend.

Eric: Yeah. That was always a concern because it's a big puddle of cash there. I have to trust the person. It's why I go with family. That's one of the problems, hiring someone—you can't just hire a kid off of Craigslist and expect them to come back with a thousand dollars.

Mike: Yes. I don't want to deal with that part of it. I've got a friend of mine who's heavy in the restaurant business. He knows a guy who runs twelve trucks, three months a year, and then nine months of the year he's doing whatever he wants. He said if you're not in that trailer, you're losing money. I've seen my own employees, who I trust, including my daughter, open their eyes when they see the pile of twenties. Their eyes change. It's like you've got to wonder, when they take the time to arrange the money. (laughs)

Eric: Right.

Mike: It's a hard thing.

Eric: You said you hesitated buying all your equipment. What was your first gig?

Mike: We still laugh about it. I emailed the lady who runs the events in my hometown where. She said, “Yeah, why don’t you show up on Thursday? We’re having a block party and they’re having town and country days.” So I show up and I have no clue really what I’m doing. And I didn’t really know much about the pressure gauge...it was hot, it’s five o’clock at night. I had my daughter and her friend help me and my wife’s outside ready to jump in. We did \$375! And I’m like, “Oh my God!” Now, my wife and I can go by ourselves and do 5 to 8 hundred dollars. I Look back at that first day—thinking we needed all that help!

Eric: I’m basically a lone wolf at this point. That’s why I got the trailer. I can do about a thousand dollars by myself without any help and be reasonably comfortable. I used to have my girlfriend/wife who you see her in the videos early on, but her health started to slip and she just couldn’t keep up. Now that I’m in a trailer, I’m much more self-sufficient. I don’t have to lug stuff; I’m older now—I’m 58. But you don’t need a trailer to get started.

Mike: My biggest thing is my sorting table stacked up on one of our front tables. It’s hard for me to get down. But if I got a cargo van and put my sorting table on wheels, I’d be self-sufficient, too.

Eric: What have you been doing for gigs? You mentioned a Wal-Mart, I haven’t done a Wal-Mart yet, but I’m interested in doing that.

Mike: The Wal-Mart thing is you give 15% back to them and they end up donating it to Children’s Miracle Network. So that’s kind of like your rent. We can only do three months out of the year at this one particular Wal-Mart. In another town you can only do a week at a time.

Eric: Who did you contact? Did you just wander into Wal-Mart and ask?

Mike: We filled out a proposal but they didn’t look at it. I actually had to talk to a person face to face about the insurance and about giving back to Children’s Miracle Network and they said let’s try it. So our very first day we set up and we had \$750



in five hours.

Eric: Wow.

Mike: I've never been able to figure out how that Wal-Mart matched that pace. We've had some \$800 days, but I in eight or nine hours. We still haven't figured out what makes a good day or a bad day at Walmart. It's just kind of weird.

Eric: Is it traffic? I've wondered that a lot on a different events.

Mike: The hard part about Wal-Mart is you can make decent money there and you've got able to grind it out. You sometimes go for two hours just sitting there watching. You kind of end up yelling at each other. (laughs)

Eric: Where are you literally set up? Right next to the door? The parking lot?

Mike: So we're kind of between the two main doors. There's a fire lane right by the sidewalk to the side of one by the grocery store. If the wind's right, everyone's buying - if the wind's blowing away from us, they're walking out—they don't see us.

Eric: I've seen hot dog trucks sometimes sit out there in front of Home Depot. I've seen a lunch trucks out there, but you are there all day.

Mike: We get there at 10:00. A lot of times we get a dinner rush, but lately we haven't been getting that. The first and 15th of the month are when people get their money and those are the good days. One day we went on the first Friday, which is a pay day, and we thought it's gonna be great. We did a couple hundred dollars. Then we went on the last Sunday of the month in October and we did \$800. I don't get it.

Eric: It doesn't change month per month? Are there better months?



Mike: Well, I think the time period between Easter and Mother's Day is great at Walmart. And like I said, where we go, we can only do three 30-day periods, so what I've learned is not to do back-to-back months. So if I could do between Easter and Mother's Day and maybe September and then around Christmas, it would be better. We just got approached by a really big outlet mall here and they said, hey, do you want to come?

Eric: I like it when people approach you (for gigs). So what is it? A mall?

Mike: It's an outlet mall. It's all kind of circled in a figure eight, and we're inside that figure eight.

Eric: Oh, my God.

Mike: Yeah, and there are thousands of people walking by all day long.

Eric: And the smell is going to be trapped inside this little alcove area?

Mike: Right, I assume. I think it can be a good day.

Eric: Oh, you haven't you haven't done it?

Mike: We've never done it. It's this Black Friday.

Eric: It's open to the sky, but you're surrounded by buildings?

Mike: There's a high pavilion opening in here, so we're going to be open to the weather.

Eric: Oh, my God! So the smell will just never leave? (laughs) You're gonna make a killing in there. You also mentioned that you do a farmer's market. I've done this one farmer's market for 12 years now, and it's funny that that the first week in August or the last week in July is always the best week. Ten years running. I don't know whether it's people going on vacation or what, but it's uncanny.

Mike: That's within our realm, too. After the second week in August, people are back in school. 4th of July week is pretty good. We've been at some smaller farmer's markets that we're trying to help them get started, and we're kind of the draw. You really need a good farmer there.

Eric: Right. Usually a bread guy helps. Yeah. The formula seems to be one veggie guy and one bread person...for successful kettle corn. (laughs)

Mike: We do our local football games. We do pretty good money there.

Eric: Who are you competing with? Typically, those guys have their own concession stand. But they'll allow you to go there?

Mike: We give 15% back in sports boosters and they really want to alleviate some of their concession pressure.

Eric: Yeah, I did some other events like that. The Boy Scouts - those guys are always looking for fundraising stuff. If you can get a whole group of kids giving out kettle corn... In fact, I did a gig at a Lions Club—the 4th of July event for this town. And they had a lock on food—we were only allowed to pop way down the street. We managed to wedge ourselves in there because we were gonna give 15% to the Lions Club. And I think they were selling something stupid—cookies and maybe hotdogs. Because the crowd was so close to us, we did a killing. The people in the Lions' tent saw the business we were doing; it was just relentless. My buddy was being greedy and only gave them their 15 percent. But he could've done more, so they locked us out of next year because we did too well. What other events have you done?

Mike: We do some festivals. There's a Harry Potter festival—it was really good. We got attached to a superhero night and the kids went nuts. We do a monthly farmer's market where we consistently pop three bags for everyone because they know they're not seeing me for a month. The other thing that's nice for us are these craft shows where we pop outside and we're the first door on the inside. So they walk by us twice. We're getting about a thousand dollars on those.

Eric: Kettle corn and [painted wooden crap](#)—they just naturally go together! (laughs) I always do well in [craft shows](#). You ever do any [Halloween things](#), or [4th](#)



of July events? I've done really well at those.

Mike: The 4th of July fireworks festival in our home town was great. We also started doing lemonades. There's a town up north that has a causeway. They close off the causeway then bring all the food trucks in and then it's just a mad rush for hours. Some concert stuff is pretty good, but the fireworks stuff is good; you can't keep up.

Eric: You mentioned lemonade. You also sell lemonade?



Mike: Lemon shakers, which makes a good day. So 4th of July we did 300 and something lemon shakers at five bucks a pop.

Eric: Wow.

Mike: When it's 80 degrees, they're not buying as much kettle corn as they're buying lemon shakers.

Eric: I know a lot of people have asked me for drinks. I don't feel like lugging all that ice, but you're getting five bucks for a lemon thing? That's way different than just a buck for a can of coke. It's sounds way more profitable.

Mike: It's 32 ounces of lemon with sugar, water and ice shaken together. But that's a whole 'nother set up.

Eric: Do you do any corporate gigs or college gigs? I've done a couple



where they pay you up front, and I just hand them out. I do a third-sized bag and charge three bucks each. Some places may only want to give out 400 bags and I say, "Okay, fine." This one college, which was loaded with money, said, "Just keep going. If you can make it to five hundred, then go ahead." I've done that one for a couple of years.

Mike: We live two miles away from a huge football college, and we're having a hard time getting in there. We haven't done any corporate gigs yet. We've done some bulk stuff for people to have popcorn at bars for weddings, but nothing like that yet.

Eric: It's nice; we get paid upfront, so there's no money involved at the event. I'm outside of Boston, so there's a million colleges around here. Usually it's [alumni stuff](#), near the end of the season so they have to make an impression.

Mike: I would be happy to get in with their tailgating at this football stadium here. I don't need to be inside with the game.

Eric: How would you do that? Would they charge you?

Mike: They're not letting me on. I'm not able to connect with the right people. When I do leave messages, they're not getting back to me, so I'm not sure. But doors are opening to us, like this Black Friday thing.

Eric: So let me go back to the equipment. Did you buy an entire rig with a kettle, motor and the tent?

Mike: Right.

Eric: So you never lived with trying to pop with no cover on the kettle, and having everything blow in your face?

Mike: (laughs) I'll tell you a story. This last Labor Day weekend we did this logging festival up north. Saturday was really good, it was smoking busy for five and a half hours. Friday was OK, and Sunday they had a parade. They kept telling me, "Build your inventory, you're gonna get hammered during the parade." Well I kept trying to build and build, but people kept buying before the parade and I never created my inventory. They walked by and said, "That's not going to be enough!"

Eric: (laughs)

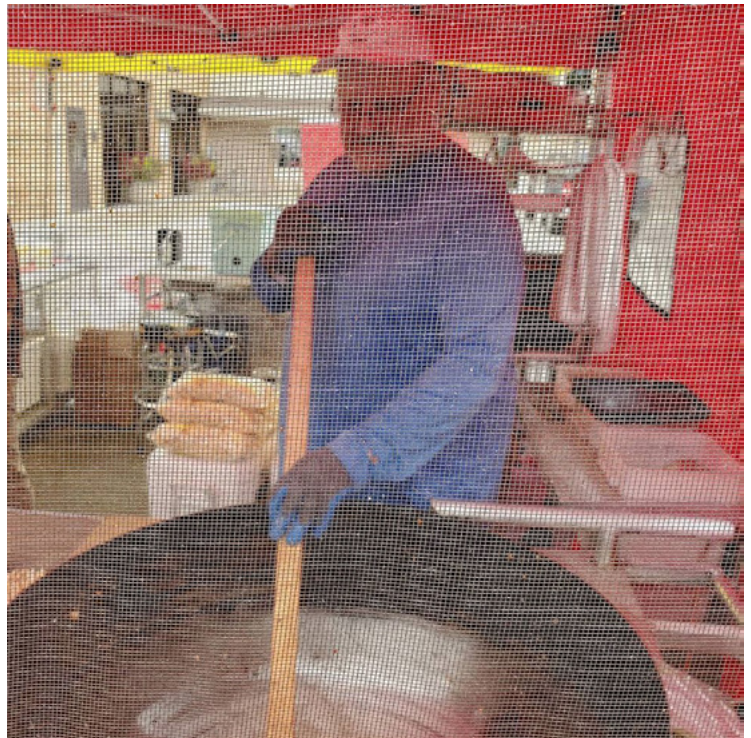
Mike: I was in panic because my motor stopped working! I almost wanted to cry. I finally took [the cover] off. The first couple of batches with me hand popping wasn't that good, but I eventually started cranking it out. I ended up putting way too much out there and thought, "I hope I can sell all this!" We ended up doing pretty good.

Eric: So you actually had a paddle and the motor seized up? You pulled the cover off and just paddled?

Mike: Yup, I just started paddling. It's like I've been making kettle corn my whole life, so I just started doing it. That was another little crisis where I had to just say, "I'm doing it."

Eric: So you have a generator? In my training course I suggest you get a generator. You do the bag sealer too?

Mike: A guy I've been talking to said, "Mike, I can't believe you heat seal everything." I'm like, "Dude, you either run it through a tape machine or add a twist tie; it's the same motion." With a tape seal, mine are fresh for at least a week. I'm getting people who say, "So-and-so's kettle corn was stale; it's gross. Yours is always fresh."



Eric: Do you use the polypropylene bags, as I mentioned...or just use the polyethylene?

Mike: We use the polyethylene, but we use polypropylene when we do retail stuff. One of the farmers that we do stuff from—this is a nice little gig for us—they sell it at their farmer's store. We give them our medium bags wholesale. It's probably an extra five hundred bucks. It's hard to keep going out there and making one hundred or two hundred dollars, but if you want to make a pile of leaves, you've got to rake together all the leaves. When we look back over our year, it's five hundred here, two hundred, three hundred there. Every day wasn't that great, but over the course of the week, we're putting a couple grand in the bank. You gotta grind through the

tough days too...rainy, cold or windy. There's very few days that are perfect, and I really enjoy those perfect days.

Eric: You mentioned you do retail. Do you actually bag stuff and get it into a store?

Mike: He has a farm store, they sell stuff at the market but they also have a store at their farm.

Eric: OK

Mike: He gets five to fifteen bags a week and he sells them at the farm store. He's probably done a couple hundred bags from us. It's a little thing but it all adds up.

Eric: In my area I had to get a certified kitchen to make it in. To even get into a store I needed the bar code stuff.

Mike: In Michigan we're set up as an STFU, [a special transitory food unit](#), so we're just like a restaurant.

Eric: Really?

Mike: We can produce anything from our tent and put in retail.

Eric: Wow! OK.

Mike: We do one little store where they wanted the ingredients on the bag, so we did that, but I don't think it did very well.

Eric: Stores are a very tricky thing, it's all about the location within the store. All sorts of people come up to me and say, "Oh! This should be in stores!" I'm thinking, "Lady, you don't know how much of a pain in the butt it is to do that."



Mike: Everyone looks at a bag of kettle in the store and goes, “Oh?” They can’t smell it.

Eric: What was this farm stand’s cut? Typically when I went into a store they wanted 40% straight off the top.

Mike: They’re five dollars bags, I sell them to him for three, just because he’s next to us at the market and gives us a break on our vegetables.

Eric: What are the health departments like in Michigan? What do you have to do to get all the permits in place?

Mike: The county I’m in, they recommended I be an STFU. I built a 3-bay hand-washing sink on my own.

Eric: So you need the sink setup, right?

Mike: In my county. In the county over from us, the guy said he wouldn’t have even bothered with the STFU. One health guy made us exempt and said we didn’t even need a sink since we use utensils and gloves.

Eric: There’s a world of difference between the health department guys. Some health inspectors treat us like we’re preparing sushi or something. The reasonable ones know that we’re not going to kill anybody—it’s popcorn. You run into so many different variations.

Mike: I think we’re good for anywhere. I thought let’s be ready for any county. I didn’t know what to expect. Our county is the worst in every respect.

Eric: What do the fire departments have to say about using propane in Michigan?

Mike: That was interesting too; they never bothered me. In fact, there’s a fire station across the street from our big farmers market. What I do is anybody who is in uniform—military or police—they get a dollar off every bag.

Eric: Yup!

Mike: A lot of the times, I drop off bags at the fire department because they help out so much and I appreciate what they do. One day in my first year, the chief just

comes over and goes, “You can’t be doing this.” I thought the farmers market and the health department would say that. He came in my tent and eventually changed his mind and said we were OK. We’ve been sending them bags ever since.

Eric: Yeah, on my trailer I made it a point not to mount big propane tanks on the front so I could use a smaller one. I cover all this in my training course, what the health departments are looking for, what the fire departments are looking for. I leave my tank inside so I could change it all the way down to a 20-pound tank, the kind you find on a standard outdoor grill, and most fire departments will leave me alone.



Mike: What they do want to see is the propane tanks in milk crates so they don’t fall over, and they should be strapped to a post.

Eric: If you see [my trailer video](#) I have it like that. But as long as you don’t have a big tank, they’re not gonna come out.

Mike: I must’ve got that from you because I was glad that it was in a milk crate.

Eric: So you’re basically doing this full time. After two years, you’re making a living at it.

Mike: Yup.

Eric: Plus you and your wife. You left a corporate job and are just doing it.

Mike: We take all our money from the farmers market from May through September and that pays our bills for the whole year. Our bills are paid through April and that’s when we’ll start popping again. The rest of the money goes into another account that goes for other expenses. We balance ourselves on the cash flow at the end

of the month. When you start to run a sole proprietorship, like we are, a lot of the clothes you buy are uniforms.

Eric: Write-offs.

Mike: Right. There's a lot more write-offs. Every time we go out to dinner we start talking about business and we just write it off!

Eric: (laughs) Yeah, your vehicle is a write off and whatever you're pulling.

Mike: I use Quickbooks self-proprietor on my phones so that does the mileage for me, which is nice. We just do my wife's gas, we don't do her mileage. I can never imagine going back. I say to my wife, "Do you ever get tired of setting up every day?" She says, "Well, when I was in grocery I was stocking shelves every day for somebody else."

There's days when you wonder if you want to keep doing it. You ask, "What's the alternative?" You could always go back working for somebody else who doesn't really care if you are there or not. I remember, shortly before I started this business I helped this guy set up office furniture. It was sixteen hours, really hot and I was making \$17 an hour. It was three hours away from home and we didn't sit down at all. This was the first time in my life I just wanted to quit, it was so uncomfortable and so hot. But I was so excited to make \$17 an hour and get a \$300 check after all that, and I almost died doing it!



Eric: (laughs) Not that kettle corn can't be extremely hot, but you're making way more than three hundred and it's your own gig!

Mike: I'd rather sit in the parking lot of a Walmart, watch the comedy relief and make \$300 by myself!

Eric: Right.

Mike: And it's not that hard! There's days when it's hard; it's hot and it's non-stop and you're on your feet for four to five hours. But those days, you're coming home and spending an hour counting money too!

Eric: So give me a review of [my video training course](#). I'll have this interview on the site. So give me a review and your expectations. You've bought my training course and now that you've actually done it for two years, how'd I do?

Mike: You offer so many valuable things, I didn't do it 100% your way, but you opened some doors for me to figure out how it was going to work for me. Your case formula and your recipe are one hundred percent and it's the biggest asset. Even like the generator; I looked at so many generators and I ended up getting a Honda 2000. If your generator goes out, you're losing a lot of money. I have two of them now. I even got the Honda 2200. Even the place where you recommended to buy it was the cheapest place, no shipping and sales tax by about 50 bucks.

Eric: I think my generator's been going for 14 years. A couple of squirrely things have happened, but I managed to keep it going. I'm considering replacing it just because I feel like it can't possibly go for another five years!

Mike: (laughs) I worry how much fuel is left. I just stop and fill it up.

Eric: It definitely goes for 6 hours if you're not hitting it too hard.

Mike: I would say you've given a great tool [to someone] who wants to go out and make some money. If you're retired or don't have any income coming in and you just want to make a hundred or a thousand every Saturday for six months... There's a lot of way to do it. I think you did a great job, you've helped us, you've changed our lives. We appreciate you a lot.

Eric: Cool! So you guys make it a point to ship the [Morrison Farms popcorn](#) (which I had recommended) to you, even though for me it's like \$40 a bag to get it all the



way from Nebraska.

Mike: It's still around \$33 for us.

Eric: It's amazing how many people screw this up. I've had lots of people say to me, "This is crazy yummy kettle corn!" and I keep thinking, "How do other vendors screw this up?" Apparently you can, especially if you go with the \$15 bag of popcorn from Sam's Club.

Mike: I've done a lot of testing, I've gotten samples from Gold Medal and tried it on the stove. You had mentioned the Nebraska stuff, so we got a bag of that. When we popped that up, the top came right off the pot! There was so much more volume, this is what we're doing!



Eric: There ya go!

Mike: I had some Amish guy saying we should try their Amish corn.

Eric: The organic stuff?

Mike: I know what works, so it would take a lot for me to change. I know what I'm getting per bag and what volume. By the way, your numbers are right on as far as gross. I save a lot of money by getting those 4 1/2 gallon jugs of oil.

Eric: Right. I should be doing that too. I've just been going to Walmart and getting the gallon sizes. Actually they have the two gallon sizes.

Mike: If you can find the four gallons, it would be worth it to set it up somewhere. On your formula, that saves us nine dollars, that compensates for the corn. I ordered two skids of corn at once this summer and it saved us \$300—if you got a place to put it.

Eric: That's a good idea; it comes on one truck, so they don't kill you on the ship-

ping.

Mike: Right.

Eric: It's the same deal for the oil. We use corn oil. Some vendors go, "Well I can save money if I use canola oil." I'm going nuh-uh.

Mike: You're talking about pennies when you're making \$620 on a 50 lb. bag. Why mess it up?

Eric: (laughs) Yeah. It's amazing how people can screw up the kettle corn biz, or they don't care—they just hire a kid who will burn it. They had kettle corn at Fenway Park a while ago and I was watching it going, "Oh my god, the guy is just torturing it!" He wasn't even stirring it; it was burning. People were still eating it. It's amazing how they can screw it up, it's four ingredients!

Mike: The recipe is easy, my wife and I talk about it all the time, how can people screw this up? I think using twisty ties screw it up because it leaves it stale.

Eric: I just go with the polypropylene bags. When you load your car up with polyethylene, your car smells like kettle corn, it seeps through the plastic. Polypropylene bags are the crinkly bags you get fruit baskets.

Mike: Our normal bags last at least a week. During the summer it doesn't matter, popping one day and selling it the next day.

Eric: I've dealt with a bunch of earthy-crunchy types outside of Boston. [On Earth Day](#) I'm forced to sell it in paper. I'm like, "Oh boy".

Mike: We're gotten comments about our plastic straws, "Do you realize that will be around forever?"

Eric: (laughs) Yup.

Mike: That's why we're giving it to you so you can use it for the rest of your life.

Eric: (laughs)

Mike: There's been some talk about bio-degradable bags. I think even Canada has

passed a law where they outlawed plastic bags. I'm like just, "Man, we need to figure something out."

Eric: Point is, you need to keep food fresh. There's a reason why refrigerators exist. I know people want to be politically correct, yes it's in paper and if you eat it right then and there it's fine, but how are you going to get your produce home? It's like we'll go back to the 1920s and use blocks of ice.

Mike: Back in middle school and high school, it was all paper bags at the grocery store. What a great innovation, do you want paper or plastic? We're saving the trees!

Eric: I always make the joke, please don't feed our plastic bags to sea turtles, I don't want to see any turtles eating that bag. Make sure you take it home. (laughs)

Mike: We tried bio-degradable straws once and they degraded too soon, it came out of the side!

Eric: It's popcorn, it wants to absorb moisture immediately. Trying to pop in a rain storm or when it's 100% humidity, you literally have six minutes to get it into a bag or else it gets totally chewy. "I've got chewy popcorn! Wonderful!"

Mike: We do caramel corn, too, from Gold Medal. It's the same measurement; you add two cups of powered caramel. For my business, we do 50% caramel corn, 50% kettle corn. About 25% of people wouldn't buy kettle corn. It's not the coated, heavy stuff; it's the light stuff, it's not evenly coated. My wife's 80 quart machine actually makes it way better than my machine. I had a lot of burning when I first tried it.

Eric: Interesting.

Mike: We put the caramel sugar into the kettle, just like the regular sugar.



Eric: With normal caramel corn, you pop it first and then coat it in a big, motorized stirring bin, but you're not doing it that thick.

Mike: We put two cups of (powdered) caramel instead of sugar into the oil while it's popping, and it comes out brown. It's got a nice, light caramel flavor to it.

Eric: It's a little sweeter than regular kettle corn.

Mike: There's a little residue in the sorting table. We have to wipe off the lid of the stirrer because it gets on there a little. What I'm telling you is it would increase your sales by 25%.

Eric: I've done maple corn by putting maple syrup in there. It's crazy yummy, but crazy expensive. You're saying the caramel stuff is cheaper than using maple syrup.

Mike: We get a 50 lb. bag from Gold Medal from a popcorn store right by us. It's about \$68; that's why we charge a dollar more for caramel. It works exactly the same.



Eric: Yeah! Alright!

Mike: I appreciate what you're doing by helping people become an entrepreneur with a pretty simple business. It really has changed our lives! We love doing the work and we're grateful for what you've done.

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