

Dream Jobs: Ice cream maker

By Mark King, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.23.16

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A woman making ice cream. Photo: Nico De Pasquale Photography via Getty Images

Katy Mace and her assistant stir milk, cream, sugar, eggs and strawberries into a huge metal bowl before pouring the glorious result into a giant ice cream machine. When it comes out 20 minutes later, after a lot of spinning and whirring, the mixture has been cooled to minus 12 Celsius (10.4 Fahrenheit). It is ready to be poured by hand into Downsview Farmhouse tubs. This is homemade ice cream.

Dairy Farming Is No Cash Cow

Downsview Farm lies off a quiet road in the English countryside of East Sussex. Mace has been Downsview's chief ice cream maker for the past four years. Sarah Farnes, who owns the business, explains that when the price of milk began falling five years ago, she needed a new product. Fresh ice cream was the result.

Working Close To Home Is The Cherry On Top

The ice cream business took off, and Mace quickly came on board. "I live nearby and have two children at local schools, so the job is perfect for me," she explains.

The majority of the farm's cattle calve, or give birth, all year round, so there is a steady supply of fresh milk and cream. This means that two of the four main ingredients move easily from the herd of 160 cows to the tubs of ice cream.

"It really is incredibly fresh, although I never see the cows while making the ice cream," she says. "I prefer to leave them to the farmers, although in my first year here I remember being roped in to chase some of the cows around a field."

She's Able To Have Her Cake And Eat It Too

Mace was working in a bank when she met Sarah Farnes at the school their children attend. The demand for the ice cream grew too quickly for Farnes and her family to cope with, so Mace was soon offered the job of ice cream maker.

"It's certainly less stressful than my previous job, though it has its moments," she says. "In summer we can't really produce enough ice cream as the demand is crazy, or we might run out of lids or not have enough of one ingredient, so it has its own challenges."

The Inside Scoop On Production

Mace has an assistant to help in the mixing, ensuring a smooth production line. Sugar and eggs are added to the milk and cream before each batch is given its flavor: strawberry, chocolate or more exotic flavors like honeycomb.

"We make lots of flavors, but chocolate is the hardest as it's very thick and difficult to stir in," she says. "It's also the messiest. If you get the slightest bit on you, before you know it you find it's smeared everywhere, on your face, arms and legs. I've picked the kids up from school covered in chocolate. You do get some funny looks."

All the ingredients are mixed in the metal bowl by hand, sometimes using a thick-wired whisk mixing tool. It is then poured into the ice cream machine, which cost the farm £43,000 (\$53,000). It heats the mixture to 84 C (183.2 F) for pasteurization that kills bacteria and then cools it to as low as minus 12 C (10.4 F). The heating and cooling take about 20 minutes in total.

"Flavors with more cream only need to be cooled to minus 9 C (15.8 F) because if they stayed in the machine any longer they'd be churned into butter," Mace explains.

Some flavors require additional ingredients, such as pieces of honeycomb, which must also be stirred in. Anything with added bits, like white chocolate chips or raspberries, takes longer.

Each batch Mace puts through the machine makes 10 liters (10.6 quarts) of ice cream. In one summer day, she will produce 20 to 25 batches. In winter, when demand falls, she might produce 200 liters (212 quarts) a week.

The ice cream is sold in individual tubs (120 milliliters/4.1 ounces), bigger pots (500 milliliters/16.9 ounces) and larger sizes of up to 5 liters (5.3 quarts) for catering companies. The most popular flavors for those buying the small tubs or cups are the classics: vanilla, strawberry and chocolate, with honeycomb coming high up the list, too.

From Fruit To Nuts

Every day Mace will follow a strict color order, putting through the lighter, creamier flavors (vanilla, honeycomb) first before moving on to fruits. The darker ice creams such as coffee, toffee and chocolate come last.

Once the ice cream has cooled, it oozes out of a vent at the bottom of the machine into a metal cylinder, which Mace attaches to a press that she hand-cranks to ensure a smooth stream of ice cream into the tubs. The newly made ice cream goes straight into a freezer, ready to be distributed to farm shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants.

You might wonder how much ice cream Mace herself eats. "I don't eat a lot of it," she says with a smile, "because I'm here making it every day, but my youngest child loves it. If we go on holiday I always have to taste the ice cream wherever we are, to see how it compares."

She also helps develop new flavors if the farm receives requests. "We've had some strange ones," she laughs. These include parmesan ice cream, lavender flavor and even a soy sauce ice cream for a Chinese restaurant, she says.

Not As Easy As Pie

The list of 22 more recognizable flavors Mace produces includes pistachio, cinnamon, coconut, caramel and blackberry. The daily grind of preparing the ice cream, mixing it, filling the tubs, cleaning and sterilizing the equipment is not easy. Mace admits that she often looks forward to making the darker varieties because that means the day is almost over, except for a 40-minute cleanup.

"Actually, I don't mind the cleaning," she says. "We do a thorough job and even though it takes a while, I know I'll soon be finished and picking the kids up."

Mace says that the work of making ice cream is more than just a conveyor belt of mixing, filling and cleaning. For example, she recently helped local schoolchildren develop flavors for a competition. The winning ice cream went on sale to raise money to fight cancer.

"We made sure all the children got a turn," she says. "They did really well, though it was more chaotic in here than usual."

Quiz

- 1 Read the following paragraph from the section "From Fruit To Nuts."

Every day Mace will follow a strict color order, putting through the lighter, creamier flavors (vanilla, honeycomb) first before moving on to fruits. The darker ice creams such as coffee, toffee and chocolate come last.

Which of the following can be inferred from the selection above?

- (A) The lighter flavors go first because they are the most popular.
 - (B) The lighter flavors go first so the darker flavors will not discolor them.
 - (C) The darker flavors go last since they are the easiest to clean afterward.
 - (D) The darker flavors go last because they don't need to be cooled as long.
- 2 According to the article, ice cream making can be a tiresome process. Which selection BEST supports the idea outlined above?
- (A) The demand for the ice cream grew too quickly for Farnes and her family to cope with, so Mace was soon offered the job of ice cream maker.
 - (B) "It's certainly less stressful than my previous job, though it has its moments," she says.
 - (C) Every day Mace will follow a strict color order, putting through the lighter, creamier flavors (vanilla, honeycomb) first before moving on to fruits.
 - (D) Mace admits that she often looks forward to making the darker varieties because that means the day is almost over, except for a 40-minute cleanup.
- 3 Based on the article, Katy Mace would MOST LIKELY agree with which statement?
- (A) Ice cream making is an entirely creative process.
 - (B) Ice cream making is a lot more difficult than banking.
 - (C) Ice cream making is extremely labor intensive.
 - (D) Ice cream making is challenging yet fulfilling.

- 4 How does Mace contribute to the ice cream business in a creative way?
- (A) Mace gets to interview and hire new assistants.
 - (B) Mace helps to create new ice cream flavors.
 - (C) Mace creates new ways to heat and cool the ice cream.
 - (D) Mace has created a new process for mixing the ice cream.