Speaker 1 ([00:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/vzWyPlzsCZACcjnPgXb0nMe2mDZKAoAox52TznTOgAhhTAktqnhYYqMUKpyX0UQlhuwpKTYpYd5K0K_E1K7iK2Hu924?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=5.5199999)):

Main Street Business Insights is a production of Main Street America, an organization leading a movement that's committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in historic downtowns, and neighborhood commercial districts nationwide. To learn more, visit mainstreet.org.

Matt ([00:26](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/GhKgopUHQBsJI9t35jRkdkmti68yKsavlblTrsru5Zna1ywKwuHxURNApcbJBqUqxxuBSEQ8C9Xrf3rEbK1uJmZk820?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=26.07)):

Welcome, everyone, to the next episode of the Main Street Business Insights podcast, where we feature the stories of America's downtown and neighborhood entrepreneurs. I'm your host, Matt Wagner, chief program officer at Main Street America. And today's podcast features Harvey Williams, Jr., co-founder and CEO of the Delta Dirt Distillery in downtown Helena, Arkansas. Full mission, everyone. This, I believe, was probably the first time, in numerous years of business travel, in which I actually had to buy another suitcase while on the trip, in this case, just to ship back some of the spirits I bought there. And if you have a taste of Delta Dirt's sweet potato vodka, you'll know why.

([01:06](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/KRXdaUQamR2sOzcbUiINs4cHNB2A-LcQmZ5a7EhWunBHXEpIOKcpNUWVvs6hFzNebOJ74JhxrJM6TE4YdJhG4h7ySUY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=66.5099989)):

Harvey and his family are innovators in so many ways, I discovered. Delta Dirt is the only Black-owned farm to bottle distillery business in the U.S., having discovered a more efficient way to extract the sugars from sweet potatoes, to create a vodka spirit that has now won multiple awards, including double gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition, triple gold at the MicroLiquor Spirits Award, and gold in Best in Class for vodka with the American Craft Spirit Association. Underlying these accolades is a fascinating journey that you'll hear, that speaks to the challenges of farming, and the pure rarity, given the profound decline of Black-owned farms in the U.S. In fact, just 1% of farmers in the United States today identify as Black according to the United States Department of Agriculture. These numbers are down from 1 million Black farmers a century ago. In 1919, Black farmland ownership peaked at 16 to 19 million acres, about 14% of total ag land.

([02:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/VspikS3_ccpy_Z2L4g9j-U8fPBtPACI6RYiMCEp6wLwwzXEVVFJLmzwoe2vSk1hexDaXsQnpUksJ0QGk-tq37vHIkBw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=131.37)):

So, before we hear more about the Delta Dirt Distillery story, I wanted to shout-out to my friend, Dr. Veronica Womack, executive director of the Rural Studies Institute at Georgia College, and the amazing work she does as a founder of the Black Farmers Network. This effort is so helpful in not only preserving current Black-owned farms like the Williams', but the helping to spawn, grow, and scale a new generation of Black farm operations. There'll be a link to the network in the show notes to learn more. So with that, hope you enjoy the discussion, and we'll see you on the other side.

([02:58](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/sH_E5ndPxG1g-wFbJdgPDZNDb9GHAwyV1LCWeLJ21HGfas9y5ZUXKTDhbT9Fbb4_TEi2pohhZlWZ2BhD3Bi1yKYrY7s?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=178.41)):

Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Main Street Business Insight podcast. I'm your host, Matt Wagner, chief program officer at Main Street America, and today I'm so excited to welcome Harvey Williams, co-founder and president of the Delta Dirt Distillery here in Helena, Arkansas. It's so good to finally be sitting down with Harvey. I've been able to chat with him, and I've read many stories about the business and his wonderful family, and this really just amazing story of taking what was sweet potato farming and other farm crops, into a vodka and gin business here in downtown. And so I'm going to get started right away with turning this over to Harvey to tell a story, because I've got a lot of questions, Harvey, so I'm going to turn it over. Tell us a little bit about your journey. How did this all become a business for you?

Harvey ([03:47](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/UYqEfXbnR3gi2Hbcv2u_l2uY0EPjzSxW05-OaXAi8VEL1IvbbecvrAOht3XA4D6Zx0fgiUZ-7-JGxevpaZOWdApXTZ4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=227.58)):

Well, first of all, Matt, thank you for coming down to Helena. This is a small town, but we're glad to have you here. For me, my story really started here, about 20 miles, I grew up on a farm nearby from here. And really did like a lot of people in small towns, they get out of high school, they just started looking for opportunity. I went to school and got a good job, what I considered a good job, and I just had a career in food processing and moved a lot of places across the country. I did get lucky and married a local girl.

Matt ([04:26](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/dd0tVoa4OESHTkFe1yJv_Ux5Dn0W-bsNhDwId3upZOWso-8wSrGB4FJEzKa6adnNhY6NWpTryKD2ZQu_XDvI1ZgDimE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=266.099999)):

That helps. There you go.

Harvey ([04:27](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/3CX2Nf7hqIz1CxcedU7uZwjcsCWk8ShkSJk8SEU5vKtSzCiF-1wiIsaaDlKS4ElBPdO1fxyqunTWiyqFIBsKPnKhXAk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=267)):

[inaudible 00:04:27] High school sweetheart. And we... Oh, I can say this. This coming Saturday will be our 34-year anniversary.

Matt ([04:35](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/7-dxM4PmdBTz9KYG4njSNyJCnN43nCBkfR9e_ekoKeVKx66chdj3VOggnTd7l2JGr6gVJAFxfFyMq11n_8W869QJKtE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=275.7)):

Oh, congratulations.

Harvey ([04:37](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/GK__fycx_lx1o2S8trLULAIBFHQ3ywhcjaVnuJ4zH1GW0HGgx3zqaVzvgnjmb4hTrDlIHaTjpAXU418BOPIeq7p0Tb8?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=277.38)):

So we're excited about that. But I had a good career, and raised our family in various places, and then moved back home. That was kind of always the idea. Although for my wife, she said, "This is sooner than I had anticipated." But we always did want to get home, and wanted to start a business. And this distillery really is a culmination of everything that I have done in my career to say, "Okay, now, this is the next phase for us." I had jobs doing many different things, disciplines, and I look back on it now, and I see that those roles, those different jobs prepared me. I only worked for two companies, or three companies, but each one of those jobs prepared me for the things that I would need to run my own business. And you just never know that that was going to be the case, but it's helped in everything that I'm doing now.

Matt ([05:45](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Gw4cLaWhwE5Dwg2gcgBYQZwd7H0rLNYnBZAyfADCelXcjOn6PFC_CImmg13cno1J2jvaHix40Vo-HiDdkuT5fb_gbjc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=345.0299999)):

It's wonderful. Wonderful.

Harvey ([05:46](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/ri28btHnbNv_mJQpZsh26dOYtbQ3JxHIhrzN_bNvybioRobN9OstPJ7iOod8EAQLlO9SA2NNyMWmT9RBoJ3uKNCaQWc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=346.26)):

This distillery is... It didn't start out being as big as it has become, but it really is fulfilling for me and my family, and it's been a bright spot in this community, which I'm really, really happy about.

Matt ([06:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/3KhpMUtUxPj1K9PARmfdWhwBt946tOs_Mz3ZW0zDK_e0DmEC4cBir-4QTPSyhc-uosUDvAKZvIYLvdd6Wttq5A5f7UU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=365.46)):

So, let's talk a little bit about farming. So hopefully my Main Street colleagues... "Oh my God, he's going to talk about farming. What about downtowns?" But farming's changed quite a bit over the past many decades, and most farming in this country has gone very corporate with the big three crops. And it seems with any business there are key decision points in which you need to pivot. And it sounds like that you've had to decide to shift and diversify, and you got into planting sweet potatoes. So, tell me a little bit about that, and then how this sort of innovation occurred into vodka.

Harvey ([06:48](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/AUpgfhsrqeyJJylEpe-QdpDLAaupmy1U2QGFMrLfrpGwpqbH7b577Sy4I-u5xi5qK_Cb-Cpg_aCNaj_dAQkSes43yyg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=408.929999)):

Yeah. Yeah, it seems like a major leap, but really the sweet potatoes happened a generation before me. I mean, like I said, I grew up on this farm, and my dad, out of almost mere necessity, diversified into vegetables, away from traditional row cropping, because we didn't have a lot of acres in terms of farming. And when he started farming after his dad, 86 acres was not a tremendous amount of acres, and especially if you're going to try to sustain that with soybean and corn and wheat. So he diversified, and got into vegetables. So I grew up growing sweet potatoes, squash, purple hull peas, okra, those type things. But he did it in a commercial way, in a way such that you could sustain. And he had business with Walmart and some of these other big food service outlets.

([07:49](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Mo18Ucc2d6OoUgqbI9lwERwQmP9dKQ_8VYXlea7xngbeBcjNCcH8xPyRBOgq_vZb0Ogqm9fCibyCh31h891XucZBJw4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=469.26)):

So, me moving back home, wanting to have a business tied to this farm required, I guess, another level of diversification. And I actually got the idea from my baby brother who stayed back and farmed with my dad, and they would go to these vegetable conferences every couple of years. And that year they came back, and he was so excited about all these things [inaudible 00:08:16] with sweet potatoes, and specifically North Carolina. And he said, "Man, this guy had some vodka there." So he introduced the whole idea of sweet potato vodka. And I thought, "Man, we should do that." And I started researching and investigating, and said, "Can I really make a business model out of this?" And that's kind of how the whole concept of sweet potato vodka came about, and having a distillery. So, everybody's got an origin. [inaudible 00:08:49]

Matt ([08:50](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/U4PqimxsnKCtqYjIIU7dYmWb9uK4rg9hIHClMytyu6Dp9lITFXe4-hhQ1jLPeCNheUep4kOkaAw6IWDgiiX_zgaV8FA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=530.49)):

That's right. That's right. Okay. So, tell me a little bit about the art and science, because it's one thing to grow the sweet potatoes, but I imagine that there's some science behind going into the spirits business. How did that occur?

Harvey ([09:07](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/RwVmM8Wkuv-INttC8CSKPzGKFmOy11hABiFDgzWunQ9-gEfPSVPlNfRKd0899PtpHkjrhf6vGtnDfdMoqiyN4HcnTMM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=547.05)):

Well, the first thing I did was start asking a whole bunch of questions, start researching on the internet and trying to figure out, is anyone using sweet potatoes to make vodka? And besides the one that my brother found in North Carolina, there were two others that we found, one in California, one up in New Jersey, actually, of all places. But there's a reason why not many people are using sweet potatoes to make alcohol, and it is the science that is that barrier. Because extracting these sugars out of sweet potatoes, even though in the name and inherent sweet potatoes, my wife found a professor to really help us figure out how to extract those complex sugars and convert those into simple fermentable sugars, as he calls them. And there's a lot of science to that.

([09:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/zMh6iHAsXHvc_BVXbThlDor0d_N4EkHWLyX7lj_Si2xPkmHWJKLwB7KeF3Iifi5by37bZYvqAxWideiGSS73Hgn4ESY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=599.4)):

And my son, I have two sons that work in the business with Don and I, and so fortunate for that, but we went through a whole series of tests over months of time to try to figure out how to get those sugars out of those potatoes. And fortunately, we've been able to have some breakthrough science that allow us to do that and extract the sugars and the flavors out of those sweet potatoes.

Matt ([10:29](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/hlL0zNyKr6V58Pc3p6t16FgPkHCyW4cD6x3_-quBNbpOLX_tGaGQGWalYur19kn4m9rtoYkWSab8Xsqflk7mFmXM2qs?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=629.52)):

Excellent, excellent. So, I did a lot of reading on the business, and your family has just a fascinating background and legacy in farming. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about one of the particular stories about your granddad that maybe had some interesting ties to distillery and distilling, spirits, a long time ago, and maybe it was part of the heritage.

Harvey ([11:00](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/cCAsy0JaQj_DuVuXbKgWjQ37fwgDz0lTr4v0K71ExcbOuari-7wHzJfuuKqYktb-dTvrnSXvAZvZyNF-YzGkGWe8fCU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=660.99)):

Yeah. That's an exciting story. Really, it is. And had we not pursued this distillery business, that may have been a story that got eluded from my whole family. So, my great-grandfather started our farm in the late 1800s, farming that land, and he never owned it. He was a sharecropper that whole time. And then my granddad started farming [inaudible 00:11:23] same way, he's a sharecropper as well. But he was able to buy our farm from that sharecropping system back in 1949. And he did that with the money and proceeds from the cotton that his family picked and the moonshine that he was making on the side. So...

Matt ([11:44](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/evd2vRrIWkQQyPym7Hh2FOqIPfb_EuT_E5OIEYA7Rm6I4t2Ig4RmupVX1bR6X0KtxZhcDhlAyhmjSO1wkPJoKMg5Ta4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=704.0699999)):

It's like the old-time side hustle.

Harvey ([11:47](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Bm8E2UWd-krkMUPbmDteIreZJzspCSzGyNCz0IjSTkgsg4wbTIPewDfb9fGy4hrVCS--deCRSRLg24-HzPggQ1Ms0MI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=707.34)):

Yeah. Yeah, that's right. So, to learn that during this process was just... I mean, it was just fascinating to know, because my dad came... We were in the midst of this project, and he comes out with this jug, the one you see over in this corner here. He comes out with that jug and says, "This is the only thing that we have left, or the last thing we have as evidence of your granddad doing moonshine." I'm like, "Okay, you got to tell us more about that story." But as a result, now the whole family knows that that's how we essentially acquired the farm, and it became part of our history. So, it's just a big deal to know that.

Matt ([12:26](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/EHb9-TSR1GlXoogqBRKmiTOejNdKkNyfMKstIGgU3AkVc4r6wQXxwB5qHg2aQdQ1j6Pw3Q3YqjkaO8gX_JiPkNB2yYg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=746.28)):

It is. It is. And I know that also there's a special year, I believe, in '86. Does that ring a bell?

Harvey ([12:35](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/1cGbROm2-XLcZKsb_rSishN6scMKFbJbFCwLe8fzIVKL5IgXWCacZxMMLpV-HY35N_2F-7ZaNLt2CIjBMVhTuDhjmhk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=755.940001)):

Yeah. So, I told you the story about my granddad getting our farm out of sharecropping, but I didn't tell you is, it was 86 acres that he was able to get, and that was the original farm, which like I said, is 20 miles from here where we sit. So, part of the commemoration, 86 sort of became our number, because when we finally got a batch of sweet potato vodka, we thought 86 is our number for two reasons. One, the number of acres that my granddad bought. Two, my wife and I graduated high school together in 1986, which... Okay, some things just aren't by accident, I guess.

Matt ([13:22](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/qfn1KWTUoI9vqKNE9aTfGT_kvTUKkytZF4u2hH2nDA8LeUhzXd0MI5JLRw_h-JLDcCzmSe0XPHzTAknQFHUATPdrwRE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=802.05)):

That's right. That's right. And I will have to mention that we are brothers, and that I also graduated in 1986 from high school.

Harvey ([13:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Gkr3kgwfuuROQMw62u7Q7WE2udQd1kRi50vX5-mpMFoUKsbB3R3m6ebnZnO1-hgtVvA0zD4jgrWHZVOP9mZhbmUW29Y?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=811.35)):

See, this story is meant to be told by you.

Matt ([13:34](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/5wFetVL0r5rZFkbL15ZPJxh5Uooh85EAw4hqPqRPqlYVPqLezujDoawbMTw7rpubyFskqubTx_mc1TadhpPUzm4ijDY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=814.95)):

That's right. It's perfect. I'm going to switch into the business a little bit more. When you decided to and the families decided to launch the distillery, obviously you had a long legacy in successful farming, you had your corporate background that you talked about, and certainly a solid plan to get this all started. Given that we're in certainly rural America, in the Delta region more specifically, what were the challenges in starting a business here?

Harvey ([14:09](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/SkzNgLtA9jOoVxvMvhi2nEdEQrfsVNglJxYQQ2Ci34eUKiEY8fDk4R7dFfEaJ27Lv82HsyRsXtZncZORdgFTMITQxs4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=849.9)):

Well, there were many. And this business in particular, distillery, is not your everyday business either. Part of the challenge is deciding to put your business in an area that is almost forgotten, and you don't have much business activity. And I find Main Streets like where we are, and Main Street downtown Helena, Arkansas, Main Streets across the country are in one of three phases. They're in the phase of complete decay and dilapidation and just forgotten, or some version of revitalization, which I think is where we are, or there are some who have really made it a destination and is part of the vibrant cultural fabric of that community.

([15:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/6v5qTzrpvlrh8BM4f4xrLc4aGevnrqNj4K0Qc0QjIwm135hLledUPXJ_0niQiy61IrxCebLpougnYmE2Ai96R08bywk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=903.33)):

So, for us to put it here, we've been challenged with not much traffic coming down, not many resources in the area to really get things done that you need done for small businesses. But we persevered anyway, and decided that we're going to do it. And we have been pleasantly surprised and really fulfilled with people saying, "We are really ecstatic about you guys putting your business here and investing in an area that has seen its best days." And I think, well, the best days are yet to come. We just got to go through the growth of this. So, there are a lot of challenges, and you can imagine every small business has its challenges. They are of exacerbated by not having many resources in a small town.

Matt ([16:09](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/GXRq8-kc-gaoCRXKQhGwJcVyKulhj1uHW8Q7HIFEmBDrLvatXPUa4HXlMdIhv1sn22BariMR-tjoNdnEQUzjQBuZx3I?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=969.839999)):

Yeah. In the distiller business, and folks can't see what I can see, which is a lot of equipment, it's a very capital intensive business.

Harvey ([16:21](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/sAmKkZBjksFvJVsO4d_u6GSI4OWWtWkT5bRLP02xFgphccWHO5y1ghRL9B8a8x-egdmrpG5cpcMrZ8mKH-MeVhFfOpk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=981.2399989)):

It is.

Matt ([16:22](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/SpdrzRZmmw-2UzbUmrggPUcU9sQOskb3jgW1sxhV3yA30Yb6rRYRvMpvlLYKVXWBgN_qptZFGLNN1HI0Zae0x_P2v6k?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=982.11)):

When you think about financing, how did you approach that, given how capital intensive this business is?

Harvey ([16:29](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Trdtr4VvMMgou6TaUJ5HOA3s8eP42eTlr7dKShpUIyXh_EF6haCZLOkDgsrXmaPdRYA4h9BUvMxN-K1SyCtb0pH8NT0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=989.49)):

Well, to be honest with you, Donna and I were a little bit naive in that we were attempting to finance this business on our own without getting capital funding. And I say that's naive because this is a very capital intensive business, but we wanted to be able to do it the right way, at our own pace, and not feel so much pressure to deliver this and deliver that. But as it turned out, there was gaps. In any business, you're going to have things that come up that are unknown. You get a business in a downtown historic district, you're going to find things in that building that are unknown, and they're costly, and they are unexpected, and unexpected expenses.

([17:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/QuTH55fWIxcwyubp6dUWKHpHfvrM53ms5tcp5wiIkBsAy24DPSDPQEN4cOCYGmnxThSC0nrDmeZdjmABv0XX-S2JwKE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1045.05)):

So, we had a gap, and we had to seek some financing to help close that gap. Traditional financing was not available for this business in particular, people are unfamiliar with distilleries here, and for the most part throughout the state of Arkansas. This is not Kentucky or some of the traditional distillery states. So, we had to get some funding from outside of the state and some non-traditional financing resources. But we, again, as I said, persevered and forged through that and figured out how to make it work.

Matt ([18:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/vdT4AnP8BEdf2EHRVuHu62hSOMwVWrj2-zBEv_7J9osnsj1r0r_A47Jl9u8pxROHnreU3Kubm6WJyQyJeoAW0KISKh0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1085.58)):

And now, do I understand that you've also had some additional outside external financing that really looks at distilleries? And walk me through what that process was like. That's not very common for a lot of mainstream businesses to think about angel or venture capital in some ways.

Harvey ([18:23](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/hT_cXT6kk3rw7ORhY6kQC8TQT2bp2vTZj-fMgDxdm5XUQejMDePuKkh3M4Dvzf8njDBhsT04ii_6w2gkV73Fq9wl2b4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1103.4)):

Yeah. We have gotten the attention of a lot of people from the outside about what we've done. I didn't expect all this attention. And much of it has been pleasant. We learned that we were, after we got started, that we were the only Black-owned farm distillery in the country, which I had no idea that that was the case. We were growing our own grain and sweet potatoes to make our product. And then as a result of that, there was a group out there that said their mission is to help minority businesses who were trying to get into the spirits industry with some financing. And that has been very, very helpful. But they've also brought some technical expertise and some industry knowledge that... I didn't grow up in this industry, so there's so many things that I don't know, that they've been really helpful with data and distribution and learning some things that you don't know. So for that, the Pronghorn Group has been really helpful for us.

Matt ([19:36](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/4k_2E3UzZdm0C3BUpBEG_fBe3HSGwQQb5bVsdf2qhXnNEMW8s6wdDa1AW8M0-29_v1tky4kMPvdKYc75HZnadVwubMs?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1176.72)):

Yeah. It's like having your own back office, from marketing to actually getting product out, like you said, with logistics. It's a huge resource for [inaudible 00:19:48].

Harvey ([19:48](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/RgS1cRLI1OhTx7GZch7aPq_mkunN9dIymrIpcHKqvvZ-h-ZBnWyeK1LX1yHoiiQ6c441N9Hs01IpfxH9CQv2emhg-gU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1188.299999)):

It is. It is. And I can't say enough about them, and giving them a shout-out in our discussion, Pronghorn has just been really good for that. And you can applaud the initiative that they've done, not just for us, but for the spirits industry.

Matt ([20:07](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/NQAdgBH4z6aPopQFfCIT6D3QKxYQZ-MNQRpN3BAvzNKOlxcIGeIJoXEZfutJ86WVB4wIjnfU-4I4WFPR1VJJ8LEcSdA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1207.59)):

You could have gone certainly a more traditional business to business route, where you were selling to distributors or to other retail outlets, but you made this decision to open up what is really an amazing facility here in downtown Helena. Could you talk about why that was so important for you and Donna?

Harvey ([20:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Y22ENRGsmlRNj2LBjl5Rj4Al30fMS7nROb7zSmFG86XgPZcu4fhMicqewidqm84Qg3LbwOeNF8h5bk9ch4ixyHseyjw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1231.53)):

Yeah. And you're right, and the initial thought is that this business does need to be based on production and getting product out the back door. That's what my business model was on, getting it clearly across the state of Arkansas, but beyond that, I want it to be across the U.S. and now my sons have pushed that envelope and said, "We're going to be an international business." And I'm like, "Okay, I'm good with that." But we also created this space because I wanted people to be able to come in and see a distillery. I took a lot of, when we were doing this business, I went on a lot of trips and visited a lot of distilleries.

Matt ([21:20](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/xgN5Ba8NcN9qLVMkKGABKLkn2nfjYV-2fxfDYVT_d-mSEkuADIede1jFYjpkQlyVNiUGvokS3hMea5VTwzphH4_I5kI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1280.22)):

Those had to be fun tours.

Harvey ([21:21](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/A0bHtUzZka9rKIGFsJOZHAI2OcgIJv13mf3Dr4nXz1MqwvtiWtLod3JUku0GwNPi9p0OrzstpUncM1r16VNUEJI_rp0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1281.09)):

They were. They were. And they were learning journeys for me, because I asked a lot of questions, I was doing a lot of observations, just trying to figure out, what are people doing? And one of the things that I knew that I wanted to have was a tasting room, and a space where people would come in and be comfortable, enjoy our spirits, take a tour, see the facility, and hear our story. And that's really the primary reason why Donna and I both decided that we're going to invest a lot of time, and be intentional about this space and what we were doing here.

([22:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/22VSrDeZ9DuMxSImUiOANDs-uHqRKndMMuBLZo4NMsexELR_bOjuZKx4hro3vlfz7Vcw61rMkYPPSKd0R2VWbVOFnLg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1324.44)):

And if you know the country, we call it the country, rural America, there are not a lot of distilleries really in this part of the state. And I wanted to take the mystery out of the distillery. People's experience with alcohol is typically just at the retail level. Well, that's made somewhere, and it's made in a place just like this, and it happens to be from products that are grown in your own county, nearby. I just think it's a special way to help people to see that and learn more about it.

Matt ([22:41](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/KizRh_P1Wva1HWDnixxw5VM7u-82kgiaYfOc0x9ISxhs_bsNzBZEdVBM56yPpCHEG19m8vd1izZGZMhCctK29ZlINd4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1361.04)):

Yeah. Combined with just an amazing family story. So, I should also mention that is important about downtown Helena, is the wonderful commitment. Your wife serves on an advisory board, as does Thomas, your son, and just further demonstrates the commitment that all of you have made, not only obviously to the business, but to the downtown.

([23:07](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Lsg0EGn5VmEI8fF8HEbsWFWQ-0IwNMC3RcXfzK_AEFdLBiJCSmJxYS9ctNxI-AK7buKLWQwrMlkoHG9B8KMbt8r6uo0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1387.83)):

I want to talk about the pace of business, if we could, Harvey. You all started sort of in the midst of the pandemic, even though there was a lot of work before the pandemic, and the pace of change seems to have accelerated, and I wonder what's changed in the spirits business. What have you experienced over these last few years that maybe wasn't what you anticipated and gives you a pause to what's my direction going forward?

Harvey ([23:40](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/EzIJ_rwnZPv8Tc4PgOI9qPQIK-rd-YjCDd8p6Jq4F2_nA_u76cy9roSky49CRDTViKEpTRVOgZJgq3JuTd1PlHMS6Og?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1420.440001)):

Yeah. I mean, that's an interesting way to look at this. We essentially are a business that started post-pandemic. We were on the tail end of the pandemic, and we opened up. We opened up April 1st of 2021, and it was a different time, and I wanted to open up, but I wanted to do it in a safest way possible. So, we've got those photos of our grand opening, and people are in masks, and we got hand sanitizer everywhere, and those type things. But one of the things that is clear is that people want to be out. They want to have community. They want to be in places that they can share with each other and learn. And I think this distillery is a place that has become a gathering place for people post the pandemic.

Matt ([24:41](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/jBthMByq-xG39ULK3ncagmx2ZIKSZMpxO8ZjaS8YsozjmX1apea2GXSMFayjMPGKfG2i6iMUU_Eb0XRvO_NEoqhegss?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1481.46)):

Yeah. And the reality, and I'll take some photos and we'll post them in the show notes, but we are actually in what is like a living room in the distillery. So this truly is the community living room in many respects. As the president, and certainly one with the family leading the company here, what aspect of business ownership do you find most challenging, and what is most rewarding for you?

Harvey ([25:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/APcb5A09gcnlV0bUtnDfdF59S_7I1N7viINtJnSPzVl0qiOPAgMw74AXw2iQDMsmfcTTlHA9zylwnkBkgt6pHAID8pg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1510.6199989)):

Well, in many respects, the challenge is the reward. I mean, to me, everything... Because when you're a small business owner, and a new business owner, I've never owned a business before, everything is a challenge, and everything really is a problem to be solved. And you go through the process of figuring out who you need to know, what you need to know, what resources do you need, and you start to learn and grow.

([25:47](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/ao2iL5zrWhQOhvwgpW6TZ79cAgTgIUehjE9TR4O4cTyamt1r1lu4hN5s4YXZLF2ug8-LLMj2nQ7sH6kKN11TsYI-EqE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1547.07)):

And on the other side of that, it's like, "That feels good, and look what we've done." And I can tell you from the very beginning, when you talk about the pandemic impact in our business, the equipment that we bought, the main steel and distillation equipment, came out of Canada. They sent the equipment down, the building wasn't ready, so them coming down to do the install, I just wasn't ready for them. Got ready in March of 2020, and they said, "We can't come down." I mean, I don't think their government was allowing them to come down [inaudible 00:26:2 [inaudible 00:26:23]. ] pandemic."

Matt ([26:24](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/JgClIwvF-EQPAzBLsJlh_4TgE5sw4Pt7HOb68MIcDEwDbH4mEAaKFHp1tbbnY2CyyZ0hviWVpQGu6EsnGpfLLRC-wkc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1584)):

[inaudible 00:26:24] yes.

Harvey ([26:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/s3JkneanWtZ7kyaDxihvRyXD9Q5B6mDeISVMo41pnc6hr7VsU_wYk8hwvyPSulDEhn-fiZDsax2qNjcljH4VtVDWDuc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1585.35)):

So they sent me all the drawings, the blueprints, everything. And for the most part, me and my brother and my nephew, we put this equipment together.

Matt ([26:36](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/FMz6bWLgW4A9nmOiL3gxDKv1krzi2mm_iWYjK-9gR8p5WJ3BLghymY6NHVgX0XkE5Frdj4WTbg9otnDNdvN3AfzpeZo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1596.75)):

Wow.

Harvey ([26:37](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/igr9-1CLwcA_YTVG07nkb8hTmWHtCj2V2qwYX9s9BhrSD-6Ai2UvjHCmI1a4iXBgor0ed4YlGXCE2ED0i6g5ljCpVVk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1597.59)):

At least the initial assembly of it. And that was a challenge. I mean, if you think about it, that's a challenge. And once you get over the daunting part of, "I've got to do this," then you just get on with it, and you make phone calls, you do the FaceTime, you do whatever you can to get that done. And you learn. [inaudible 00:26:55]

Matt ([26:55](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/m_X1BwrroKhcxIfnQ-o7Klg6mfGlVT0Yw2xkusppk-J10Ynv7ozVEXhMFLb188QkvseAU4MxK5O9LF85IjySHg7MHRM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1615.049999)):

That's a hallmark of a small business owner. Do whatever it takes.

Harvey ([26:58](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/3VZ9_BccPiuRgpu1BpEzh6se82zb0ffMximh3lbTb3MjnZL6rN0KwQnAQJVRv3GZtdGZPluWlmjX-_e42CfN77_fxL0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1618.77)):

Yeah. Yep. And just last week, we... Well, the other challenge, I mentioned it earlier, was figuring out the science behind these potatoes. And the reward is, we've gone from probably fourfold in terms of yield from when we started with the potatoes to what we are able to get now. Just last week we made our first production run on our semi-automated bottling line. We were sort of hand bottling. We had some tabletop things that allowed to wash the bottle, fill the bottle, put the label on. And now that's somewhat automated. You load the bottles on this table, and it does the wash, fill, cork, label, and put the tamper-proof seal on, and you catch the bottle at the end.

([27:49](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/X3mtLuHQz3SKrBBiFwQN_Ts3ifB4trHYN4kHlZWnd1JpoAULRDRHixPPdYDJC0l-3lDeusK3w_xxbV0skVuekNAPGUY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1669.02)):

But we had to figure a lot of that out on our own, because we didn't pay to have the technicians to come in to do the install. And I've been on the phone with them a lot, but we met that challenge. And the reward is, we were able to produce both sizes last week and did a successful changeover it. I know that's a crazy answer, but sometimes the problem and the challenge becomes the reward in the end.

Matt ([28:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/cKNw_uSvx_z2iBtBGVU-GzvKKhNRbpWZbhlath8Gux-Puaj_S1KJxx_geC7h0PMSIZLIuajRW4NYQ9ZVH_Q1I9_57wY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1699.77)):

It also showcases the importance of new learning, especially in the realm of technology, and how that can bring efficiency to a growing business, which you've obviously had to transition to. Given you have a farm and a variety of distilled spirits in the market, and I should say a variety of award-winning, which we'll also post in the show notes, but where do you see the future for this business? Where are the opportunities for you?

Harvey ([28:52](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/6ylU7Zjt07s4-tJTFPBtvsAOofqWsWB77Ndjp_69GuIqk4nGRqM816u6ui7b2dXHNnfkph9WRbMJltJt0gK6XxfLXlY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1732.35)):

Well, I don't think we have maximized the products that we have now. I mean, this sweet potato vodka is amazing. We thought we had produced a good product, but you don't know that until you really have an independent body, and you send it out to be judged, and you wait anxiously just sweating and just waiting on the feedback to see how you did. And for our product to win the top award in three of the major spirit competitions, is humbling. It's pretty amazing. And there's a lot of opportunity for people across the country, and the world, I got to start thinking globally now, to taste this product and understand why this product has gotten a double gold for two consecutive years with the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. And you see the article behind this from Forbes that said, we were one of four who competed for one of the best vodkas in the world.

Matt ([29:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/xZc4IL2B-fsj9kzhIz6Hb-19tEnQ6pSdk9j80JM44TLBJo_WBac3HMwqWMADFNshejL6Y7TSpqSh98A070npA2QlQic?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1799.219999)):

Amazing.

Harvey ([29:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Pyjc7EgUswYQD-LKoHnKBGqrzZZfmZDsPR-ed3qMyVF5t6FInu7tDw7l-GNemZ-r0OOh7u0WKq6qSdfDtdPwj2btRCI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1799.849999)):

And to come in behind the UK is pretty amazing, right? Right here in Helena, Arkansas.

Matt ([30:06](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Tuh3qKw9sya4GV4i8v1JWMGxembOaKRIbl9RCOq9L7VFRnaRBWFWTSXaVEwQUwIbiGK1qqyYpqG16V5Lz3Ka2DTYaTw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1806.72)):

We're moving it to Helena.

Harvey ([30:07](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/v5b7zyjNTFPOncTkXhKhcKSvU7R5mYmn9T_KN-xM_RKnRjYjy16YzWMEEhwqJ5O8HUV2cwNDarkm0diG3kzPRZ_ykZY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1807.71)):

Yeah.

Matt ([30:08](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/A2ZgNgIVDpY6MXPjilfV_307EcG_coU46dTQyGb-g-VQAPDDRM4jwNeDlf6p0zC6jM_ZEIDmKCF6wVWELqENbSy71TY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1808.94)):

That's awesome. Let's close out with some advice for other businesses. Our goal here is that small businesses can learn from other small business owners. And so, as you think about all the things you've learned in this journey, what kind of advice would you give to other small business owners?

Harvey ([30:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/bqIjJK7qbL33M7ywaSRUGVhzKbksKe7zFDoqj9mKquhfK9bIUXkP4qNXCFaPounnml91Zbfz_TzgjLNjd23iqwyhsMM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1828.62)):

Well, you can only know your own experience, but I would say, especially if you decide to put a business in a Main Street or an area that's in process of being revitalized, find a way to make sure that you can sustain your business during that period. And we decided we were going to do that by having a model that the product is going outside of our location here, but there are other ways to sustain your business. So I'd say one, make sure that your business can be sustained.

([31:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Nur8vTo4GyBtbasv7ujxHOgp4QfP-gTbwYT68-5Owfc_4b8eusLE7yagvZAtMxt_EPnbO_ChmLhcd94ci6UMcD5cMY0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1864.98)):

Number two, be okay not necessarily following all the norms of a standard business. That's like your days or hours. We're only open here in this tasting room three days a week, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We didn't attempt to be open every day, for a lot of reasons. One, we're small family business. We just don't have the manpower to do that, nor the money. The other part is, we're back in the back, in the distillery, we're working. We are distilling and cutting potatoes and grinding corn and all the things that it takes to run a distillery. But we found that Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, it's good. It serves the purpose of allowing people to visit both local and from afar in this space.

([31:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/FSpGLqmBZejbkcFTaPAUyIXvm3lpnKMPaYZoy16FKXoWwIxy4F8qIXpZKmmiEFQ5UR7PFRvf5QtmO_LG96K3BCOP4VI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1916.04)):

And I think the third thing I would say is seek out resources that are willing to help you. Some are even designed to help small businesses, and I didn't do a good enough job of seeking out some of those resources. They're out there. I mean, sometimes they are technical resources. Sometimes they are low interest loans, grants, just there are things that are out there that, if you seek them out, you'd find that there's more than you originally thought.

Matt ([32:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/9OFNJrs8yykcnF_DXm34qEwehH_piJbXvAibdVu4aeYLxF6_8MO8YO9afDmXyuEjH81UqvEzPZLfrjF8JegN4UEq7k4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1951.89)):

Great lessons in diversifying your revenue model, to don't be afraid to craft your own pathway. And I think you're right. There's a lot of resources that's going to build that connection, you've got to go out and seek them and find them. And so, Harvey, I've just had a wonderful time chatting with you and certainly wish you all the best, and you and your family, the best of luck in the business. And now, I think it's time that I try some vodka.

Harvey ([33:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/_iqYTlebOdM-cKt0msum9avMON5AWeYDbBZWmdYwJlJ9zV36JdcNpqb1S4Kb89qdCz4ZGN7iyGHyZ8GX3Z5V_ISoc5A?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1983.39)):

You won't be disappointed.

Matt ([33:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/qjSDfZceJvgTImz_ZbF4K5xqLuGJjL2EbZ60r3zzoInKS2nW418iL-gvwf48WcT_lV0QTtvI4RvyzOzoQrAaZDpNqp4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1985.22)):

Thanks, Harvey.

Harvey ([33:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/aj2VlNCtXNyoLSKfy2Z4FVlOJbtz65HbXyZQWIna7DzbDFNcXBiCOvp-NcpUOgH32hBQbPTfXc4InGZmsq9J8QM6v3U?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1985.91)):

Yeah, thank you.

Matt ([33:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/jyqkibKiUwggANMyfb5awe4Pfr721gT6PR6sNcxrdhnYbAlEiZEHnMMYTC30u0mHWuGAQBVmpZAPeOYkcg0M_aaOKAc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1996.949999)):

So, there you have it. I hope you enjoyed the conversation with Harvey Williams, Jr., Delta Dirt Distillery in downtown Helena, Arkansas. A remarkable human and family of business and community leaders dedicated to making the best product, while delivering on a dream to make their hometown a much better place for everyone.

([33:35](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/g-M6naaNc-vPsQqGQ77ydOYTuSLxoGV39DQsADzFzMfDy1mcW-hLSDFoO-R3sGxtkTww_qtoDmvp-JcVOEg6patX11g?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2015.639999)):

I try to take a lesson away from every one of these visits, whether it's a new idea or a solution or what have you. But I must say, with Harvey and his family, my lesson was more rooted... Well, I learned a ton of things, but really more rooted in emotion than a professional education opportunity. I was just beaming with this sense of honor of being able to share for a moment Harvey and his family's journey to what is not only a successful business, but just this incredible giving back and sense of commitment to community.

([34:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/qOEKiokm6JfHVo6_J90fKrDkwv6Er5hkhxBs0u0wAMOh1mNbYuQaVwc7AVVw2L6sv3WvGMCvTGNfU2kVHz_5s-7EHMI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2050.559999)):

So, with this big smile on my face, thank you once again to the Williams family for sharing this story with all of us. So if you're a business owner, I hope this episode has provided plenty of new insights, solutions, and inspirations. And as consumers and professionals in the field, please continue to support your local small business and tell their stories. They're so important to our local and national economies, and most importantly, they promote and provide the quality of living to the places we all call home.

([34:41](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/geYzApX5SW2oxNqIzZlerJjF7HLxpJ8rK_aH7EIjsXvAqa2n6wU_01Uv0MHk65HdUH_ARP8yr7unXPO0AROc2zjZ4To?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2081.25)):

That's going to do it for this episode of the Main Street Business Inside Podcast. Thanks again for listening. Please rate and review us, and as always, be sure to subscribe and tell your friends and family and neighbors and colleagues, so you all can catch us on the next episode, when I'll be in Elkhart, Indiana, sitting down with Danny Reynolds, owner of Stephenson's, a generational apparel store with, get this, a 91-year history. You can imagine the stories coming out of that long history. Don't miss it. We'll see you then, and thanks for all the support.

Speaker 1 ([35:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/2yIKiNk6QDyC_pUTCkqa5nh7YFXglISOIpeKyq4k-y9f9-_MDNlLZxDWYssEp6OHqbiNzGWQaYkyNdz0Ei7keQA4SUg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2116.59)):

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