

Community

Sustainability and Family are the Seeds of Success for Nova Scotian Entrepreneur Erika Clarke



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Using skills learned in the RBC Alliance for Young Women Entrepreneurs Program, Erika Clarke recently launched Sow Local Seeds, a sustainable seed producing farm in Nova Scotia.

In celebration of International Women's Day, RBC is shining a spotlight on Women Entrepreneurs.

Growing up, Erika Clarke always dreamed she would become a farmer just like her 'Grammie and Gramps.' However, as she got older and moved to Head of Jeddore, Nova Scotia, a rural fishing community on the ocean where the land was not favourable to agriculture, the idea started to become out of reach.

When COVID-19 hit her community in 2020, it brought a new wave of home gardeners and Clarke, who always dreamed of owning a home business, saw an opportunity.

"The pandemic brought awareness to the globalization of food distribution," says Clarke. "Seed companies couldn't keep up with the demand, and as I searched for different seed sources, the lack of transparency in the garden seed industry was shocking. Customers care about the origins of their food, but what about the origins of their seeds? The farmers of the seed crops were rarely listed."

RBC Alliance for Young Women Entrepreneurs

With the idea of starting her own farm for seed production, Clarke joined the [RBC Alliance for Young Women Entrepreneurs](#) (AYWE) at the [Centre for Women in Business](#) (CWB), at Mount Saint Vincent University. There she met Natalie Frederick-Wilson, Business Advisor, Student Programs Manager at CWB.

"The Centre for Women in Business supports women business owners to have equal participation in the entrepreneurship ecosystem," says Frederick-Wilson. "We are excited to be celebrating our 30th anniversary of supporting female-identifying business owners wherever

they are in their business development. Ultimately, our aim is to stimulate economic and individual prosperity through the growth of women-owned businesses."

The program helped Clarke find the motivation she needed to become an entrepreneur.

"Natalie hit me with the question of 'five whys,'" says Clarke. "To dig down and find the root cause of why I was delaying my start-up. It turns out there were no reasons, just excuses."

For Clarke, the program provided her with more than just motivation, she also learned tangible lessons to begin her new business.

"The RBC AYWE program provides access to entrepreneurial workshops, leadership training, mentorship, and business skills training," says Frederick-Wilson. "We offer one-on-one business advisories, business development assistance, and resources to help launch her start-up

business. Through a partnership with RBC's women's employee resource group, we also offered a mentorship program called 'Lead Mentor + Peer Mentor = Goals' and Clarke participated in this, receiving mentorship from eight RBC leaders."

About Sow Local Seeds

Upon completion of the program, and while being a mother to two young children, Clarke officially launched her new business: [Sow Local Seeds](#).

"Sow Local Seeds is a seed-producing farm providing Nova Scotia grown vegetable, flower, and herb seeds to home gardeners across Canada," says Clarke. "Seeds are non-genetically modified, untreated and are produced using sustainable practices. Our core values are to support local, to be transparent and to grow sustainably."

With her two children in the garden with her during the day, Clarke has expanded to include a free seed pantry and community seed saving talks and demonstrations.

The rewards of entrepreneurship

A former electrician, Clarke says running her own business provides positive changes. Most importantly, she says, it allows her to have a career that aligns with her values and to share her life with her children. It has also allows her to share her heritage of farming with her family.

"I'm excited to grow out some Borle peas this year, a variety my great grandmother Borle grew in her gardens in the 1800s," says Clarke. "She brought them to Canada and they have been passed down through generations."

Also, a rewarding part of becoming a small business entrepreneur for Clarke was the ability to connect with her community.

"Being of service to my community is another benefit," says Clarke. "I do what I love and I get to share my skills and knowledge with other members of the community. The opportunity allows me to be the example I wanted to be for my children — connected with our food sources and participating fully in the community."

Impactful lessons and advice for aspiring entrepreneurs

Clarke highlights that seeking out available advice and support were key to getting her start.

"There is a lot of support out there, you just have to know where to look," says Clarke. "Join groups and programs that support entrepreneurs — like RBC AYWE — because these are the environments where loans, training opportunities and grants will be shared with you."

As for the perfect time to start? This doesn't exist, according to Clarke.

"There is no perfect time to start," says Clarke. "There will never be an ideal time to begin your business, to take a mentorship program, or to start saving money for your dream project. Don't wait and do it now. If not, you will keep finding excuses and your dreams will never be more than dreams."

To connect or order seeds, you can visit www.sowlocalseeds.ca. For more information on Sow Local Seeds Pantry and to follow their day-to-day farm activities, follow them on Facebook and Instagram @sowlocalseeds.

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