

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

If you're looking for new ways to add to your bottom line, take a look at the money-making ideas featured here and on the next page.

If you've found or heard about a new income-boosting idea, we'd like to hear about it. Send details to: FARM SHOW Magazine, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 800 834-9665) or email us at: editor@farmshow.com.

Live Bait Vending Machines

Selling live bait 24 hours a day through vending machines has the potential to bring in good income, but it also takes work, persistence and prime locations.

Eight years ago, Joe Hokel of Athol, Idaho, purchased six live bait vending machines after learning about them on a visit to his home state of Iowa, where the machines are made. Within a few months he bought six more. Weekly, from spring through fall, he fills the machines and also delivers bait to businesses along a 150-mile route.

"I sell 120,000 to 130,000 nightcrawlers a year," Hokel says. He also sells smaller worms, maggots, and glow-worms, which are nightcrawlers that turn fluorescent green from eating a powder that Hokel adds to their bedding.

Worms survive up to six weeks in peat moss bedding, while maggots last two weeks in sawdust. Bait is packaged in Styrofoam containers required for the refrigerated vending machines.

Hokel buys bait and packing material from wholesalers, and can pack 75 to 100 containers an hour with a dozen nightcrawlers each. He takes 200 to 800 containers on his weekly route to fill his 12 machines that hold 170 containers each.

Location is key. At first, Hokel placed three machines near an exclusive lakeshore, but sales were slow. He found out people buy their bait and other supplies before they get to the lake, so he pays \$15/month rent (plus a percentage of sales) to convenience stores and bait shops to place his machines outside their businesses.

"When things are working right, you're making money 24 hours a day," Hokel says.

He makes more profit on his \$2.50/dozen vending machine nightcrawlers, than the bait he sells to businesses to resell in their stores. Hokel notes that minnows also can be sold in the vending machines, but they can't be sold for fishing in Idaho or Washington, where he has his machines.



Location is key. Hokel pays rent and a percentage of sales to convenience stores.

Hokel says the machines are basically maintenance-free - and tough. A car ran into one of his 765-lb. machines, and it still works. Vandals broke the door on another machine, but didn't get past the second door to get money or the bait.

But things can go wrong that require extra servicing trips: someone unplugs the cord, Canadian coins get stuck, the coin mechanism breaks, vandalism, etc. Also, the containers required for the machines are more expensive (42 cents/apiece) than the containers for bait sold directly to businesses.

Hokel combines vending machine and direct sales to make his sideline business work. He is also a distributor for VCI Vending and can help interested entrepreneurs buy the \$4,300 machines to start their own route. The company offers payment plans that don't require winter payments, when the vending machines aren't being used.

"I would recommend people start off slow with one or two machines," Hokel says. He adds that live bait vending has potential for more profit in states that allow selling minnows.

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There are many ways to make money with a petting zoo, including hiring out to local businesses.

How To Start Your Own Petting Zoo

A petting zoo can be a good business if you have a good location and you run it right, say zoo owners around the country who FARM SHOW talked to.

Some petting zoos are stationary while others are completely portable. Some are a combination of the two.

Like any business, petting farms must be government-licensed in most areas and, if food is sold, there may be additional requirements. A location close to a good-sized city is necessary to have a large enough customer base.

Petting zoo operators usually raise most of the animals themselves, keeping a rotation going of the young, cute offspring for the zoos and selling them to fellow breeders as they get older.

Sometimes animals are borrowed or rented from other farmers and returned to them at the end of the season.

A wide variety of animals can be used, including bunnies, goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, geese, alpacas, kittens, puppies, hedgehogs, chinchillas, potbellied pigs, ponies, miniature cattle, guinea pigs, turtles, emus, ferrets, and more.

Some petting zoos have a specific theme, such as one called Carousel Acres near South Lyon, Mich. Here, Australian animals are featured. This farm offers wallabies, lorikeets, sugar gliders, blue tongue skinks, bearded dragons and a variety of Australian artifacts. They also have reindeer, a butterfly house and common farm animals. Carousel Acres also offers dove and butterfly releases for special events such as weddings.

Revenue can be generated by hosting birthday parties, weddings, reunions or company parties. They can also be used to draw business to farm stores, u-pick operations or

Christmas tree farms.

Stationary petting farms can also be set up as "working farms," where visitors are shown, and sometimes participate in chores and animal feed.

Mobile petting zoos can be booked for events and charge hourly or daily rates for their services. Some mobile petting farms secure contracts with large malls to set up there on an ongoing or regular basis.

Pony rides are a natural addition to petting zoos.

The first thing a potential petting farm operator should do is make sure the market isn't already saturated. By finding out if there are any other petting zoos in the area, they'll have an idea of how much business they might get.

Word of mouth and the Internet are major marketing tools, but newspaper ads and direct mailings can also be effective.

Drawbacks of the business can include long hours and difficulty finding staff so you can go on vacation.

"Petting zoos are interactive and educational, as well as good old fashioned fun," says Tammy Iaconelli of Carousel Acres. "I get the most satisfaction from seeing the animals bring smiles to the faces of people of all ages, from toddlers to senior citizens. Also, it feels good to help city people know more about animals."

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He Cuts A Profit With Metal Silhouettes

When antique car collector Larry Peterson decided he couldn't justify the price of an antique gas pump, he opted for its shadow. He cut an 8-ft. silhouette of one out of 20 ga. sheet metal and painted it black. Since then he has been busy cutting out tractors, horses and people.

His people silhouettes are so accurate that the models can be identified. "A friend of mine asked me to cut a silhouette of him, so I took a picture of him playing the guitar, blew it up and cut it out," says Peterson. "His friends and family can recognize him easily."

Peterson also makes and sells postcards with silhouettes of Amish people and scenes.

Instead of a knife and paper, Peterson uses a plasma cutter and metal. So far he has made templates for more than 40 different old tractors as well as farm scenes, horses and people. His silhouettes are as big as 5 ft. tall but most are 2 by 3 ft. in size.

"Price depends on the size and how detailed the designs are," says Peterson. "They range from \$20 for a small one to \$175 to \$200 for a big one."

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Larry Peterson has made templates for more than 40 different old tractors as well as farm scenes, animals, and people.