

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.

Barrel Girls Recycle Winery Castoffs

When Elena Kotowski and Tonya Baker went looking for a wooden barrel to hold rain water, they had no idea it would grow into a thriving business. In addition to capturing rain water, their wood barrels are in demand for plays, parks and even weddings.

Since they started Barrel Depot in 2008, the Minnesota women have sold thousands of wooden barrels that once contained wines and spirits.

It began simply enough. Kotowski didn't think the plastic rain barrels on the market would look good around her Victorian home. She wanted a genuine wooden barrel. She found a place to buy one in California, but it cost \$140 for shipping. So she and Baker decided they might as well buy a whole truckload of 220 59-gal. barrels stacked three high in a semi trailer.

The "Barrel Girls" set up a stand at a local farmers market and discovered their intuition was right - others wanted wooden barrels, too.

Wineries buy new oak barrels for \$700 to \$1,200 and can only use them for four or five years.

Obtaining the barrels was not easy.

"We spent a lot of time at wineries to break barriers," Baker explains. "We were two random women from Minnesota. At first it was kind of a comedy thing."

After charming their way in, the business partners convinced winery owners they were serious.

Barrel Depot offers barrels that are plugged and tapped with a spigot at the bottom and overflow hose at the top for \$199. They also sell plain barrels (\$99) and DIY kits (\$30). The barrels are made of American or French oak. Customers often pick up barrels at the business's warehouse or at events the partners attend. They can also be shipped - usually for much less than the \$140, Kotowski would have been charged.

Many customers earn tax credits from watersheds and local governments for installing something that catches rain, Baker says. In the metro area people are taxed for water that runs off hard surfaces into storm sewers. To gather even more water, barrels can be linked together. Some



A pair of Minnesota women started a business selling "castoff" wooden barrels they buy from winery owners. Photo shows rain barrel plugged and tapped with a spigot at bottom and overflow hose at top.

customers take the next step and buy larger tanks to match the runoff of the roofline.

"On the smallest of homes, there can be up to 1,300-gal. rolling off with just 1/2-in. of rain, Baker says.

Because of the interest, Barrel Depot offers cornstarch-based enzymes to treat water so it's safe for animals to drink. They also sell rain chains, hand pumps and other water-related products. They distribute above ground tanks and underground poly resin cisterns for Norwesco, a Minnesota company.

"We have tanks that come in many sizes from small pickup bed tanks to systems that can accommodate thousands of gallons for livestock tanks," Baker says. "These are of great use to farmers and greenhouse owners."

Whatever size, whatever use, Baker says the partners have suppliers to accommodate customers. And for those who prefer new, Barrel Depot sells new Hungarian oak barrels.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Barrel Depot (ph 952 221-2113 or 612 290-7427; www.barreldepot.com).



Irish egg producer Tom O'Brien uses an Eggspress vending machine to sell eggs direct to customers.

Vending Machine Sells Farm-Fresh Eggs

When Irish egg producer Tom O'Brien bought an Eggspress vending machine, he hoped to sell a few eggs direct instead of through wholesalers. He set it up at the gate to his farm and did a leaflet drop in the local area. Within a few weeks, he had greatly boosted sales, while at the same time simplifying his egg sales business.

"I soon was selling 60 dozen a day, 7 days a week and at a 100 percent margin over the wholesale price I had been getting," says O'Brien. "It's great to sell my eggs direct to the customers with no credit and no stores to service."

O'Brien ordered 6 more machines and has a 5,000 leaflet drop planned in the area surrounding each of the new machines. They will be placed at service stations, co-op stores and private shops. He hopes to soon market all the eggs from his 5,000-hen flock directly to consumers through Eggspress machines.

Eggspress is the creation of Paddy Muckian, a second generation, Irish egg producer. Muckian worked on the design for five years before putting it to use in his own egg operation.

Eggspress is an insulated, refrigerated vending machine with 28 drawers. When a customer puts his money in, a drawer opens and the customer takes his eggs. Each drawer is 12 by 12 in. and holds trays of up to 2 1/2 dozen eggs. Produce can also be placed in the trays.

"It can be located wherever there's a market for your eggs, fruit or other products - at

farm gates, farmers markets or even filling stations," says Muckian.

The machine not only handles customer sales as it empties, it notifies its owner. "You can set it so when stock levels drop to a certain point, it'll send a text message to your phone," says Muckian.

Muckian uses 2 1/2 dozen egg trays to sell his eggs. He says they have become associated with his farm, and customers like them. They return the empty container when they buy their next tray of eggs.

Since introducing Eggspress on his own operation, Muckian has sold it to other Irish egg producers like O'Brien, as well as to egg producers in England and Finland. He is interested in selling units direct to producers in North America as well. However, he also isn't done adding them to his own farm.

"I have one beside my farm gate and will have to add two more beside it to keep up with demand for the eggs," he told FARM SHOW.

Eggspress is priced at 4,450 Euros (about \$5,514 U.S.). As outfitted for European use, it uses 220V power. "It can also run on solar power," notes Muckian.

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How To Make Money With Skunks

All you ever needed to know to process a skunk pelt is covered in Kyle Kaatz's 43-min. DVD. In fact, Kaatz, a 3rd generation trapper and part owner of Kaatz Bros. Lures, shows how to turn a dead skunk into a sable fur.

"A prime skunk pelt makes a nice, dark, shiny and silky fur," says Kaatz. "In the 1930's and 1940's, skunk pelts were marketed as American Sable. That stopped with truth-in-advertising rules."

Kaatz says coats are still made from skunk pelts, but more end up as gag gifts, conversation pieces and wall hangings. Hats are another popular end use.

However, a skunk's odor may be its most

valuable asset. "Skunk essence is worth more than the pelt," says Kaatz. "It's used as a carrier in perfumes. It's also used as lures for coyotes and other predators."

His DVD covers gland removal, essence extraction, skinning, fleshing, stretching and marketing. Kaatz Bros. Lures buys some skunk essence and glands, as well as whole skunks and skunk furs. Buyers may be available locally as well.

Kaatz says for prime skunk fur, trapping should be done from November through January, depending on what part of the country you are in. He stresses checking with your state game department for seasons and rules. "Every state is a little different as to when you

can harvest," he says. "You'll need a license."

Trapping skunks is relatively easy to do, says Kaatz. While he knows of no book specifically on skunk trapping, most small game trapping books apply.

"You can check our website for more information or give us a call," says Kaatz.

"Skunks, the Best Investment You'll Ever Make" DVD sells for \$14.95.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Kaatz Bros. Lures, 9986 Wacker Rd., Savanna, Ill. 61074 (ph 815 273-2344; kaatzbros@gmail.com; www.kaatzbros.com).

Kyle Kaatz shows how to turn a dead skunk into "sable fur" in his 43-min. DVD, and offers more information on his website.

