

## Business Is Booming For Disc Sharpening Service

Sharp discs are more important than ever to cut through heavy crop residue. Ingersoll Tillage Group's EdgeCarePlus® sharpening system grinds discs mounted on the gang. At \$2,700, it can be a smart investment both for farmers and for entrepreneurs.

Ron Barlow, of Francesville, Ind., started a sharpening service to fit with his other ag-related services.

"The biggest advantage of having sharp discs is that they cut better and help the decaying process," Barlow says. "Even the no-till guys are finding this helpful. Plus they get better fuel economy and require less horsepower from the equipment to pull."

Barlow purchased an EdgeCarePlus 3 years ago and started making cold calls to area producers, selling his sharpening service at \$5 to \$7/disc. Now they call him so they are ready with sharp discs after harvest.

"There is a knack to it," Barlow says about using the sharpener. But it's lightweight for one person to load and has a removable handle to get into tight areas. It operates on 110 volts.

The most important advantage is that it uses cold-sharpening technology and has a timer to avoid taking the temper out of steel.

"We start out at 2 min. to see if we get the edge we want, then maybe bump it up to 2 1/2 or 3 min.," Barlow says. "Then we stay consistent with the time."

The sharpener only works on traditional discs (not wavy or specialty discs). The EdgeCarePlus system gets the factory-sharp bevel back with very little reduction of the disc's diameter.

Since starting his business, Barlow and his crew have sharpened 10,000 discs, and are on the fourth grinding stone. He plans to purchase another sharpening system to meet demand from farmers in the 100-mile radius around his business. He has traveled more than 200 miles to sharpen discs for farmers cutting standing corn after last year's drought. Besides sharpening discs, his crew has a supply of discs to replace severely damaged discs.

Barlow says repeat customers like Fenwick Farms' farm manager Brett Nesius tells him that they can cover more acres quickly, with better performance with sharp blades. Quality sharpening makes financial sense because it's important for effective material management.

While the EdgeCarePlus system is an ideal tool for a custom sharpener, it's also a worthwhile investment for farmers with large operations, says Roger Murdock, VP of



Employee Jeremy Maxson sharpens discs with the EdgeCarePlus sharpening system.

sales and marketing for Ingersoll. The U.S.-made sharpening system is available through Ingersoll and Case IH dealers.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ron Barlow, 4455 S., U.S. Hwy. 421, Francesville, Ind. 47946 (ph 219 567-

2441; jen@ftcenterprisesinc.com; www.ftcenterprisesinc.com) or Roger Murdock (888 768-1740; rmurdock@ingersolltillage.com).

## She Turned Hard-To-Grow Luffas Into A Successful Home Business

"Luffas are plants with attitude. It's the quirkiest plant you can grow," says Deanne Coon, owner of The Luffa Farm in Nipomo, Calif. "It's like an orchid – hard to grow."

But after 35 years of experimenting and growing, she's managed to create a successful home-based business that attracts visitors from all over the U.S. and other parts of the world who are interested in taking free tours of her growing operation. They also find plenty of products in her on-farm store including sponges, gift sets and a variety of soaps, lotions and bath items that Coon makes from her homegrown herbs and other local ingredients.

Coon emphasizes that her luffa sponges are not like the imported, treated sponges with uncomfortably hard surfaces that are normally sold in the U.S. Her California-grown luffas are natural, soft and washable. Most customers use them for bathing for 3 months, and then for cleaning purposes for another 3 months. After that, Coon suggests recycling them by cutting them up and putting them in the bottom of plant pots for drainage.

When Coon officially opened her business in 1999, she planned to sell through her

website and a few select shops. But when curious people started showing up at her out-of-the-way location, she realized she had the perfect business for agro-tourism.

Many visitors are surprised to discover that luffa sponges don't grow in the ocean. Coon grows them year-round in three greenhouses that protect the plants from wind and bad weather.

"They are the most intelligent plants; they dry right on the vine," she says. Luffas start with a yellow blossom that turns into a heavy, green zucchini-like fruit. Once the vine decides the fruits are big enough, it stops growing and shuts off food and water. The luffa turns light yellow, then brown as it dries and lightens up. When the seeds inside rattle, it's time to pick and peel off the exterior.

While all that sounds easy enough, the luffa is very temperamental, and seeds often do not grow at all. When they do grow, luffa sponges can vary from 6 in. to 29 in.

"There's no rhyme or reason to how they turn out," Coon says. "It's just like raising kids."

Gardeners love the challenge however, and she sells packs of 15 seeds (\$8). For the average gardener or even an experienced



Deanne Coon grows luffas in greenhouses and then converts them into soft, natural sponges.

horticulturist, only one or two seeds might grow to actually bear luffa sponges. Luffa requires 120 to 140 days of frost-free weather, "and daily love and attention" to mature.

A 7-in. luffa sells for \$8.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Deanne Coon, The Luffa Farm, 1457 Willow Rd., Nipomo, Calif. 93444 (ph 805 343-0883; www.theluffafarm.com).



## Fresh "Baby" Ginger Grown In Virginia

Ginger is a tropical crop, but Mike Clark grows it in Virginia. In a good year, he can sell it for \$15 to \$20/lb. if he gets it to market. With 4 years of experience, he admits he's still learning.

"We sell it as baby ginger before it develops the papery sheath," says Clark. "It is creamy white and can be sliced like a water chestnut. It has no fiber and melts in your mouth."

Clark had been trying to raise ginger as part of his market garden business for years without much success. With the help of Dr. Reza Rafie, horticulture specialist, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Clark finally got the right seed and advice.

"I needed high temperatures to start it

growing and then it has to stay at 75 degrees," says Clark. "If the temperatures cool down, it gets disease. Cool, rainy nights double the stress."

Clark grows his ginger in beds of composted soil under high tunnels in the mountains of Virginia. He says other growers in sandy coastal soil report good results planting in soil beds.

Rafie advises starting plants in early February in a heated environment in 1-gal. pots. "Seed stock should be at least 2 oz. in size, clean and solid with eyes on the rhizome," says Rafie. "The bigger the better."

Once the ginger has emerged, each is transplanted to 15-gal. pots in high tunnels at the end of April. They can also be planted

direct to the soil in high tunnels.

Harvest of baby ginger can start as soon as September. Rafie suggests baby ginger will produce 2 to 3 lbs. of ginger root per plant when harvested early, compared to mature plants that produce 5 to 7 lbs. by January or February.

Clark typically harvests his ginger from October through January. He sells it in small amounts to chefs and through farmers markets. He also markets his vegetable crops, including ginger in season and ginger seed stock, from online stores, including his own website.

"There are lots of disease problems if temperature and moisture aren't just right," says Clark. "The first problem is just getting

clean, uncontaminated seed stock. You can have a beautiful crop but then watch it crash."

Clark has also suffered with greedy growers. He notes that one year, hydroponic growers dumped ginger on the market. Although it was watery and soft and didn't hold up, it crashed the market.

Even with all the problems, Clark suggests baby ginger can be a good niche crop for the right producer. He sells ginger seed for \$3.95/lb.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Planet Earth Diversified, 165 Earth Way Dr., Stanardsville, Va. 22973 (ph 434 985-3570; michael3786@planetearthdiversified.com; shop.planetearthdiversified.com).