

Editor's
Notebook



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Persistent Silo Fire Extinguished

That "unextinguishable" silo fire we told you about in the last issue has finally been snuffed out.

"After your story, we received 200 to 300 calls from FARM SHOW readers all over North America suggesting various ways to put it out. I'm sure many of the ideas would have worked and we'd like to thank your readers for their concern," says Sharon Pumper. She and her husband, George, struggled for 2 1/2 months with a spontaneous silo fire that started in their concrete stave silo on New Year's Eve with a series of explosions. Area firefighters finally got the fire out on March 15th by shoveling out the smoldering silage.

The Pumpers plan to rebuild the top 25 ft. of the 70-ft. silo, but there's plenty of work to do first, says Sharon.

"We bought a used silo unloader to unload the rest of the burned silage from it, but it's a long slow process," she says. "We can't start tearing it down until it's empty because it might damage the barn that stands next to it."

The Pumpers are also squabbling with their insurance company over a settlement.

"They're willing to pay us off, but we're not signing off on the settlement until the silo's down," she says. "It's still a hazard in the condition it's in. If we'd get a strong wind it could come down pretty easily."

New Store Sells Second-Hand Tools

You can buy top-notch tools for less than you might think, thanks to a new chain of "second-hand" stores.

ReTool has six stores in the Upper Midwest and plans to open 20 more in the near future. The chain sells used tools at about half the price of original cost and also sells new and refurbished tools from manufacturer close-outs.

ReTool takes in used tools in three ways: Consignment (paying customers 60 percent of the sales price), cash (paying 50 percent of what tool should sell for), and trade (allowing a credit of 20 percent more than the cash value).

The stores have a guaranteed buy back policy. If a tool is returned in 30 days, the store pays the customer 60 percent of the purchase price. After 60 days, it's 40 percent.

ReTool began with two stores in the Detroit area. Three stores have opened in Minnesota and North Dakota recently. Two more stores will open in the Philadelphia area in late May and stores in Chicago, Atlanta, and Bakersfield, Calif., will open by mid summer.

For more information, including how to open a franchise, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, ReTool, 4200 Dahlberg Drive, Minneapolis, Minn. 55422 (ph 800 645-7299 ext. 632; E-mail: cdolson@re-tool.com).

Direct Food Sales Benefit Farmers, Churches

A group of Minnesota farmers gets higher prices for crops by selling direct to a group of urban churches. Both sides benefit by eliminating the middle man. The farmers get higher prices and the church members get food at a lower price.

"I don't know anybody else in the country doing what we're doing," says Tim King, sales manager for the group of farmers out of Long Prairie, Minn.

The farmer group has formed a relationship with Judson Memorial Baptist Church in Minneapolis and is working on a plan with the Catholic Archdiocese in St. Paul. The idea is to sell farm products direct to members of the congregations.

Judson Baptist first invited the farm co-op to show off its products at a Sunday forum. The church now places group orders about once a month. The co-op offers pork, poultry, beef, lamb, vegetables, cheeses, eggs, cookies, breads, wild rice, and much more.

Church representatives say the program is a good way to put faith into action. Members like connecting directly to food producers and the church is already talking about setting up farm visits by young people.

Monsanto Sues Farmer Who Says He Never Bought Roundup Ready Seed

Percy Schmeiser, Bruno, Sask., is one of approximately 525 farmers in the U.S. and Canada who have been sued by Monsanto for allegedly replanting the company's patented, gene-altered seeds. What makes Schmeiser's case unusual is that he denies ever having bought seed from Monsanto, claiming that pollen or seed must have blown onto his farm, possibly from a neighbor's farm.

Monsanto's crop-testing detectives took a sample of crops from Schmeiser's farm. When they detected Roundup Ready canola and found no record that Schmeiser had ever purchased seed, they sued.

The problem, Schmeiser says, is that there are a lot of plants in the area with Monsanto's gene in them. Roundup Ready pollen from other fields is blowing everywhere in the wind, he says, and he's also seen big brown clouds of canola seed blowing off loaded trucks as they speed down the road around harvest time - spilling more than enough to incriminate an innocent farmer. Schmeiser's attorney, Terry J. Zekreski, says Monsanto is trying to "own a piece of Mother nature that naturally spreads itself around".

Most of the farmers already sued by Monsanto have been paying customers who signed an agreement that they would not save seed from year to year. Schmeiser's is one of the first cases where the company is going after a non-paying customer. (*Excerpted from the Washington Post*)

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2. World's First Database of Farm Inventions: Our comprehensive story index is now at our web site. Lets you quickly and easily find any story or idea previously featured in FARM SHOW.
3. FARM SHOW Discussion Group: Read "best & worst buy" reports, shop tips, and other valuable information shared by other FARM SHOW readers.

Fighting For Insect Rights

Stop swatting flies and watch where you step, says a new group, Insect Rights Activists, or IRA. And whatever you do, put away your insecticides.

The group also suggests not cleaning your house because of possible damage to bugs, not driving, and killing bats whenever you can because they eat insects.

If this all sounds preposterous, that's because it is. The IRA is a spoof dreamed up to make fun of animal rights activists by carrying their message to extremes. You can sample the fun at the group's official web site: www.throughwire.com.

Calves Bolster Church Treasury

A rural Alberta church sacrificed a bunch of calves this spring as they have every year for 40 years. There was nothing pagan about it, though. It's all part of a fund-raising event.

Rolling Hills United Church uses profits from feeder calves as a way to keep the congregation financially sound. It's a relatively easy way to raise money and it gets people

involved, says church chairman Lee Nygaard, an area rancher who heads up the "Holy Cow" program.

Each fall Nygaard buys 30 to 40 weaned calves with a loan from the church. The calves are then parceled off to individual church members for feeding through the winter and spring. The fattened calves are sold in the spring, the church loan repaid, and the profits are added to the church treasury. The church averages about \$200 profit per calf.

"People wouldn't usually give a \$200 gift to the church if you asked them," Nygaard commented. "But they don't mind feeding a calf for a \$200 profit. It makes them feel like part of the church."

Each participant uses their own best judgement as to when to sell the calves. Funds go directly to the church and participants then receive a charitable receipt for whatever profit their "holy" calf earns.

Nearly all of the members of the rural church raise cattle commercially so they hardly even notice the extra calves, Nygaard says.

After picking up the calves at a local auction mart, Nygaard hauls them home for dehorning, vaccinating, ear tagging and branding with the church's own brand. When members take the calves home there are no contracts signed, no insurance and no guarantees. "It's a running joke that it's always the church calves that die," Nygaard says.

The church's Reverend Alex Lawson says the project is a blessing because of how it brings the congregation together. People in the community also support the project. Auction marts sometimes waive their commissions on the sale of the calves, and bidding often runs higher for the "holy" calves when they come up for sale.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Rolling Hills United Church, Box 207, Rolling Hills, Alberta T0J 2S0 Canada (ph 403 964-3577).

Facts About U.S. Agriculture

- In 1997, 75 percent of all grain in the U.S. was grown by just 113,000 farmers.
- 26,000 hog farms marketed 75 percent of all hogs.
- 85,000 farmers marketed 75 percent of all cattle.
- From 1987 to 1997, the number of U.S. dairy farmers plunged 42 percent from 202,068 to 116,874.
- According to the Ag Census, there are 1,911,859 farms in the U.S. Of that number, 79 percent have 180 acres or less or have gross sales of less than \$50,000. Those farmers contributed 27 percent of the total gross sales of farm products in 1997.
- The Census found that small farms are increasing at a rate of close to 2 percent per year nationwide. The average age of all farmers today is 55. The average age of small farmers is 40.

More Church Bulletin Bloopers

- Twenty-two members were present at the church meeting held at the home of Mrs. Marsha Crutchfield last evening. Mrs. Crutchfield and Mrs. Rankin sang a duet, The Lord Knows Why.
- The eighth graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the church basement Friday at 7 p.m. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.
- The service will close with "Little Drops Of Water." One of the ladies will start (quietly) and the rest of the congregation will join in.
- The Senior Choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoys sinning to join the choir.
- Ladies Bible Study will be held Thursday morning at 10. All ladies are invited to lunch in the Fellowship Hall after the B.S. is done.
- Low self-esteem support group will meet Thursday at 7 p.m. Please use the back door.
- The pastor will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing "Break Forth In Joy".

"Cash, check or charge," the sales clerk asked after folding items the woman wished to purchase. As she fumbled for her wallet, the clerk noticed a remote control for a television set in her purse.

"Do you always carry your TV remote?" the clerk asked. "No," she replied. "But my husband refused to come shopping with me so I figured this was the most evil thing I could do to him."