

“Tumbleweed Lady” Has Thriving Business

When a tumbleweed rolls across a road in the High Plains states, most people see a weed. But not Linda Katz of Garden City, Kan. When she sees a tumbleweed, she sees money.

For the past three years, Katz has run a thriving business selling tumbleweeds that she collects in her area.

Her business, Prairie Tumbleweed Farm, sells tumbleweeds to people all over the world. She's been mentioned twice on the Paul Harvey radio show and has also been featured in newspaper and magazine articles.

The scratchy, yellow-gray Kansas weeds have been shipped to buyers in England, Singapore, Austria, and Sweden, displayed in Bloomingdale's department store windows, and featured in an episode of the children's TV show “Barney and Friends.”

“Tumbleweeds make great home decorations all year long and can even be used as Christmas trees,” says Katz. “We sell a lot of them to movie production studios and to TV commercial production studios who use them as props. If you see a commercial on television with a tumbleweed in it, it's probably one of ours.

“They also make great decorations around the house. You can spray paint them. Gold is a particularly festive color.”

Her nieces and nephews work with her. “Last year we made about \$20,000. That's not much but when you consider that all we're selling is tumbleweeds, it's not bad,” says Katz. “We've sold tumbleweeds to people who are getting married and want a country western scene at the wedding. We even sell tumbleweed T-shirts. They're a hot item on many campuses all over the U.S.”

Katz gets her tumbleweeds from various sources. “I find them along roadsides, and



“Tumbleweeds make great home decorations all year long and can even be used as Christmas trees,” says Linda Katz.

sometimes farmers will call me and ask me to pick them up off their land. Farmers love the idea that I'm able to sell tumbleweeds and often ask, “Why didn't I think of that?” Occasionally an electric utility company will call and ask if we want to harvest the tumbleweeds on their property, because they're not allowed to burn them. I put each tumbleweed inside a cardboard box for shipping. The best time to harvest tumbleweeds is in the fall when the stems start to break off. In the winter they start blowing around in the wind which makes them harder to grab.”

The tumbleweeds are sold in three sizes. Large tumbleweeds 20-in. dia. and up sell for \$33 apiece; medium tumbleweeds 14 to 20 in. in dia. sell for \$27; and small tumbleweeds 12 to 14 in. in dia. sell for \$22. Prices include shipping and handling. There's a \$20 shipping and handling charge per tumbleweed for international deliveries.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Linda Katz, Prairie Tumbleweed Farm, 2915 Kris Place, Garden City, Kan. 67846 (ph 316 275-6913; Website: www.prairietumbleweedfarm.com).

Miniature Belted Panda Cattle

The growing list of miniature cattle breeds got a new member earlier this year with the birth of what breeder Dick Gradwohl hopes will be the profitable foundation of a breed he is calling Miniature Belted Panda Cattle.

“Precious” is a belted calf with red to black eye patches on a white face. Gradwohl, a founding director of the International Miniature Cattle Breeders Society, hopes to eventually have lots of Panda cattle registered.

While miniature cattle appear as a novelty to most farmers, Gradwohl is serious about the business he is in. “There are 21 breeds in the registry, some with a considerable number in the breed,” says Gradwohl. “As the numbers go up, prices come down. Miniature Herefords that used to bring \$5,000-\$12,000 now bring from \$500 to \$2,500 depending on size and conformation. Their price is getting to where the market shifts from breeding stock to meat sales.”

For the moment, “Precious” is priceless, says her breeder. Until he is able to show her color and conformation breed true, he has no plans to sell her.

Precious is a result of crossing a miniature Dutch Belted and Irish Belted cross bull with miniature Herefords. To qualify as a true miniature, animals must be 42 in. or less in height at three years of age. Gradwohl has started other miniature breeds through cross breeding programs and markets several self-named breeds, including the Kingshire and Happy Mountain breeds.

In addition to his breeding efforts, Gradwohl is also doing economic and nutrition studies on miniature cattle. A Texas



“Precious” is a belted calf with red to black eye patches on a white face. She's the result of crossing a miniature Dutch Belted and Irish Belted cross bull with miniature Herefords.

A&M research project reported that miniature Herefords are 25 percent more feed efficient than full-sized animals. Gradwohl claims results as high as 33 to 34 percent in his trials.

“Miniature cattle are especially suited to the small scale organic market,” he says.

“They are bred to be efficient on grass alone and produce smaller cuts of meat more in line with today's market.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Richard Gradwohl, 25204 156th Ave. S.E., Covington, Wash. 98042 (ph 253 631-1911; E-mail: info@minicattle.com; Web site: www.minicattle.com).



Gene Boley recently started a new business selling “reconditioned” antique tractors.

83-Year-Old Launches “New” Antique Equipment Dealership

Gene Boley is 83 years old but he doesn't think that means he should just sit back and relax. Instead, Boley recently launched a new business selling “reconditioned” antique tractors.

Opened just over a year ago, Boley's used tractor business is just now getting into full swing. He knows the business well since he owned other dealerships in the past.

Allis-Chalmers tractors and equipment are Boley's favorite brand, but he trades in all makes of old tractors. All tractors are fully reconditioned and then given a new paint job. He sells to both farmers and to collectors.

“A lot of farmers have big new tractors for most of their field work. They come to me for something smaller to use on lighter jobs,” says Boley.

He keeps two men busy reconditioning and painting tractors and equipment. All tractors come with a 3-day guarantee. If it isn't what Boley said it was, the buyer can bring it back and get a full refund.

Boley's lot includes a number of popular Allis-Chalmers G tractors. He says AC built 30,000 of the small utility tractors. He has one with a serial number of 29,429, so it's near the end of the run.

Boley says he plans to be in business for awhile. “I tell people God doesn't want me yet. And the Devil won't have me. So, I guess I'll be around for a while yet.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Gene Boley, Illinois Route 40 at I-70, Browstown, Ill. 62418 (ph 618 283-2695).

Half-Scale Deere “B” Tractor Really Works

When Ken Java of Frederic, Wis., set about to build a half-scale 1936 Deere B tractor, he headed straight to his junk pile. The result was a half-scale tractor that looks and works just like the real thing.

“It's proof that if you weld a bunch of junk together and paint it green you get a John Deere. I've had a lot of fun with it in parades and at shows,” says Java.

The tractor is powered by an 8 hp Briggs and Stratton gas engine off an old riding mower. The radiator is off an old school bus, the flywheel off a pump jack, the axle and rear end off a riding mower, and the hood was made from a refrigerator door. The steering gear was made using the gear reduction system off a windshield wiper motor from a Ford pickup. He made the steering wheel by bending a length of old gas line into shape. The exhaust muffler is a piece of sewer pipe.

“I'm proud that I was not only able to make it look half scale, but also to get it to work like the real thing,” says Java, who built the tractor five years ago. “People get a big kick out of it at parades. When I drive it in parades I put oil in the gas tank and let the engine idle real slow so it blows smoke rings just like the real B did. It pops four or five rings up in the air at a time.

“I built it mainly just by looking at photos, although I did measure a real Deere B just to get the correct length and height. The first time I sat on the seat I tipped the tractor



Ken Java's half-scale 1936 Deere B looks and works just like the real thing. He built it mostly from junk.

over backward. Luckily I didn't get hurt. To solve the problem I mounted 80 lbs. of lead under the radiator to hold the front end down.

“I find that refrigerator door metal works great for making tractor hoods. I made a form first, then laid a piece of the door on top of it and pounded it with a rubber mallet until it conformed to shape. Then I trimmed the edges. I had a friend make half-size decals for me. I spent \$40 on decals which was one of my biggest expenses. I had to extend the mower's axles and build an extra housing to make the rear end fit.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ken Java, 3186 Benson Rd., Frederic, Wis. 54837 (ph 715 327-8445).