

Farm-Based Businesses Help Boost Incomes

Aqua Farm Ties Fish Tanks To Greenhouse

Fish and greenhouse plants make a good combination on Tom and Paula Speraneo's S&S Aqua Farm.

The Speraneos raise tilapia, a firm white-fleshed fish that produces an amazing pound of filet from a pound of feed. Along the way, it also produces a large amount of high-nitrate fish waste.

Getting rid of fish waste and aerating ponds usually requires a lot of expensive equipment. The Speraneos decided to filter the fish tank water through hydroponic growing beds to clean the water. Bacteria in the gravel-filled growing beds break down the waste into nutrients for the high-value organic produce planted in the beds.

"We sell live fish for \$3 per pound and produce for up to \$6 per pound," says Tom Speraneo. "The hydroponic beds produce 23 to 27 lbs. of produce for every pound of fish we sell."

Tom and Paula started out in 1991 with a salvaged 550-gal. tank and three homemade growing beds. The unit was housed in a greenhouse enclosure on the south side of their home. Every ounce of feed and nutri-

ents that went into the system or came out was measured and recorded.

A year of experimenting and accurate record keeping gave them the data to qualify for a Small Business Administration loan. In 1992, they built a 50 by 80-ft. greenhouse with six commercial 1,000-gal. fish tanks that produce 1,000 lbs. of tilapia each month. Each tank is linked to 4 to 6 growing beds and forms what Speraneo refers to as a "node".

Simplicity is the key to the Aqua Farm system. Simple Sears sump pumps move water between the fish tanks and growing beds. After trying expensive aeration blowers in the fish tanks, the Speraneo's daughter suggested simply capping the pipe from the pump and drilling holes in them. The resulting water spray sufficiently aerates the tanks. It also creates a counter-clockwise current that drops fish solids to the tank bottom where they are pumped out and into the growing beds to feed a wide variety of plants.

"We have grown over 400 different kinds of plants, everything from strawberries to dwarf bananas and dwarf New Guinea im-



S & S Aqua Farms sells both fish and plants. Fish tank water (at right in photo) is filtered through hydroponic growing beds (at left), providing nutrients for high-value organic produce.

patiens," says Speraneo. "We discovered people pay more for flowers than food. We can take a bed of impatiens plants, add 75¢ worth of potting soil and pot and sell it for \$10."

Today S&S Aqua Farm sells fish, plants and plans. Speraneo has helped set up 119 installations around the world. He estimates

there are around 750 sites based on his plans in existence from Canada to the Canary Islands and Australia to Russia.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, S&S AQUA FARM, 8386 County Road 8820, West Plains, Mo. 65775 (ph 417 256-5124; email: snsquasys@townsq.com; website: www.townsq.com/snsaqua).

Online Birdseed Business

High quality birdseed sold on the Internet at a premium price is putting money in the hands of Gordon Moe and Dan Ecker, who combined their skills to form eBirdseed.com.

Moe, a computer programmer from Hawley, Minn., was floored by the difference between the farm price for grain and the price being charged in stores for the same grain sold as birdseed. He enlisted the help of Ecker, a Grandin, North Dakota sunflower grower, to launch a birdseed-selling business on the Web.

Moe programmed the easy-to-navigate website while Ecker provides the sunflower seed and coordinates orders and shipping. The Web-based business launched in February 2002. Offering a varied selection of products and free shipping, the site took off and volume has increased steadily.

While their prices aren't cheap, they're still within reach of many local stores. For example, a 7-lb. bag of "Sunflower Hearts Wild Bird Food" fetches \$16.79. Their biggest seller is a 25-lb. bag of black oil sunflower seed, produced by Ecker, that goes for \$26.25. After deducting the free shipping and the cost of the bag, the price received is still well above that of the local sunflower market.

Other products offered at the eBirdseed.com have names like Backyard Buffet Finch Mix, Nyjer Plus, Premium Wild Bird Mix, Cherry Cobbler and more. They offer cracked corn, in-shell peanuts, Nyjer seed, peanut bits and pieces, red millet, white millet and safflower.

Ecker will eventually produce millet and other grains used in the various



A wide variety of high-quality birdseed is available on a new website called eBirdseed.com.



Gordon Moe and Dan Ecker combined their skills to launch the site.

eBirdseed.com mixes.

Moe notes that while business increased 120 percent during a recent month, they're still not getting rich. But considering the U.S. wild birdseed market is about \$2 billion, they figure even a little piece of it will be worthwhile.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, eBirdseed.com, 27823 86th Ave. S., Hawley, Minn. 56549 (ph 218 486-5607; email: gordon@ebirdseed.com; website: www.ebirdseed.com).

Farm-Based Business Equipment Sources

Low-Cost Engine Analyzer

As computer chips get faster and cheaper with more capacity, it's getting easier for "shade tree" mechanics to set up shop to work on late model vehicles. For example, you can buy the new Xray analyzer for \$399. It does the work of equipment that would have cost thousands of dollars just a couple years ago.

It easily plugs into any Ford, General Motors or Chrysler onboard computer, giving you a snapshot of all engine functions. Identifies engine error codes and monitors engines on-the-go, when needed.

As new cars come out, you can get latest new codes by downloading them off the internet. Warranted for the life of the product.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, CBS Performance Automotive, 52 County Rd 5 #201, Divide, Colo. 80814 (ph 800 685-1492; www.cbsperformance.com).



Rabbit-Raising Equipment

If you're interested in rabbit production on either a small or big scale, Bass Equipment has a complete line of rabbitry equipment - cages, feeders, waterers, etc. Bass also offers vinyl-coated and galvanized wire by the roll so you can design your own cages and runs.

For a free catalog, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bass Equipment Co., Inc., P.O. Box 352, Monett, Mo. 65708 (ph 800 798-0150; www.bassequipment.com).



Do-It-Yourself Alcohol Stills

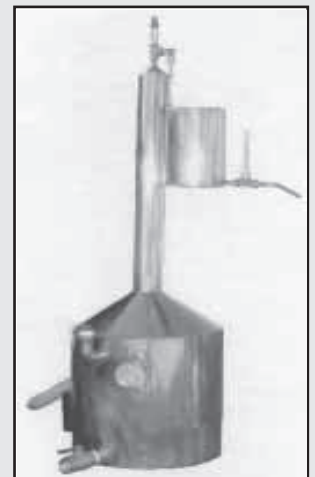
The Revenoor Co. has been building alcohol stills for more than 25 years at its plant in Yamhill, Oregon.

The company offers copper stills ranging from 5 gal. to 1,000 gal., and custom builds larger units. Models can be heated by wood, electricity, or propane.

The company has all kinds of customers but most are interested in producing alcohol to burn in vehicles or farm equipment. It can also be used for home heat.

The company provides detailed information to customers on how to make and use home-brewed alcohol.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, The Revenoor Co., Inc., P.O. Box 602, Yamhill, Oregon 97148 (ph 503 662-4173; website: www.revenoor.com; terry@revenoor.com).



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