

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

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.



Thanks to growing numbers of immigrants from the Middle East, Mexico, and Asia, there's a strong demand for the Stockstill family's goats.

Boer Goats Still Going Strong

In 1995, FARM SHOW ran a story, "Boer Goats Catching On Fast," and 10 years later, Travis and Jennifer Stockstill, Butler, Ill., say that's exactly what happened.

The Stockstills have up to 300 goats on their 94-acre farm.

Thanks to growing numbers of immigrants from the Middle East, Mexico and Asia in big cities, the demand for goat meat is growing because it's the preferred meat on certain holidays. Right now, Stockstill says most goat meat is imported from New Zealand.

"I sell most of my bucks at a sale barn. The does are sold off the farm as breed stock," Stockstill says, adding that most cow and pig sale barns have sheep and goat sales as well.

"Just like sheep, the peak price is usually in April during Easter. Some places were paying over \$2/lb. during this time. Around here, we get up to \$1.25/lb."

The goats are sold between 20 and 100

lbs. "Where I sell mine, one place wants kids under 50 lbs. and the other over 60 lbs."

A story published in the Chicago Tribune last year reported that the 2002 Census of Agriculture shows that the number of goats raised annually for meat increased from 1.2 million to 1.9 million from 1997 to 2002. The number of farms with goats increased from 63,422 to 74,980.

Stockstill says if he was starting out, he'd buy a nice buck and mostly unregistered does. "By doing this, you limit your risk of losing money. High-priced breeding stock is harder to sell if the goats aren't working out." Mature does sell on average for \$150. Most does have twins, which will sell for about \$75 at one year.

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Honey Stick Machine Sweetens Profits

Honey sticks are a sure way to add profit to honey sales. The sticks usually sell for a quarter apiece or five for a buck. It only takes about 2¢ worth of honey to fill the 1¢ straws. The only downside is most bee keepers have to ship their honey off to commercial outfits to get filled sticks to sell. Now, a Kansas family is making and selling bench-top systems to make honey and other liquid-filled sticks.

"You can put any kind of liquid into the straws," says Tony Schwager. "We've even done some with mouth wash. You can fill them with chocolate, and you could do it with maple syrup."

Schwager and his son, Anthony, the beekeeper in the family, had tried sending honey off for stick filling. With only 70 some hives and bulk honey selling for about \$2/lb., Anthony needed a way to boost profits. Using their own honey, they paid several hundred dollars for 4,000 sticks of one flavor.

Having their own machine would allow them to make sticks as needed and do multiple flavors. Schwager bought one machine, but he didn't like it. So he designed and built his own. He now makes and sells what he calls the "Goldrush 500."

"It's more of a system than a machine," says Schwager. "It's manually-operated and can make about 500 straws an hour. We pay our kids to fill straws, and they make about \$15 an hour working on their own schedule."

A heating system warms the honey to 160° or more. It then flows with the aid of a hand pump through a manifold to fill inserted straws. Individual shut-off valves control flow and fill 8 straws at a time. The straws are heat-sealed as a group, first on one end and then on the other. The machine will work with either 7 3/4-in. or 10-in. straws.

This fall, Schwager is introducing the Gold Rush 1000. It will work twice as fast, filling 1,000 straws an hour (10 at a time) and sealing the top and bottom at the same time.

The Schwagers sell the machine as well as filled sticks and other honey products on their website. They also do custom-filling of straws for other honey producers at \$60/gal. plus shipping (makes 800 straws).



Schwager says his kids make about \$15 per hour using this machine to fill straws with honey.

The Goldrush 500 Honey Straw Filling System is priced at \$569. The Goldrush 1000 will be priced at \$799. Schwager expects to have the new machines available in October. A package of straws is included with the machine, and refills are available for 1¢ each. However, restaurant supply stores sell them for around \$50/case of 12,000, advises Schwager.

One of the advantages of doing the smaller quantities is the ability to add flavors and coloring to the honey sticks. The Schwagers offer a variety of flavors in the filled straws they sell, including mint, lemon, strawberry-banana, blue coconut, almond and cinnamon, with flavors changing often. Whether flavored or plain, local honey is getting attention and not just in farmers markets.

"As part of the buy fresh campaign, even local chain stores are wanting local honey," says Schwager. "Filling straws with local honey can be a great market for stay-at-home moms and kids as well as honey and maple syrup makers."

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Dairy Barn Houses Bread-Baking Equipment Business

When demand for her home baked whole wheat bread outgrew her ability to supply it, Denise Fidler changed her home-based bakery business. Instead of selling bread, she started selling grain mills, mixers and all the other materials she had been using herself.

"Now I sell the machines and also teach people about whole grain bread and how to bake their own," says Fidler.

She first learned to appreciate fresh milled, whole grain baking while she and her husband were stationed in Germany. German friends introduced her to high quality milling and mixing equipment as well. After returning to the Midwest, starting a family and moving to a rural area, European style breads were impossible to find. Fidler began baking her own, eventually milling grain she ordered direct from Montana. Friends and neighbors soon began ordering from her. At one time, she was baking more than 50 loaves each week.

Today, Fidler tries to keep her business

"The Country Baker" simple. She advertises in select magazines and maintains a website. Products are warehoused in an old dairy barn on their rural acreage and in the family garage. Between her home baking supply business, some travel and home schooling her children, she prefers people stop by appointment only. When they do, she will show them the equipment she recommends, but it will likely be on her dining room table.

Even the equipment she carries helps reduce business hassle. From the stainless steel bur mill from Nutrimill to the Bosch mixers, companies either offer a lifetime warranty or are known for excellent customer service.

"I decided when I started the home based business, that I wanted very little contact with people about problems," she says. "I am willing to spend more for quality, and most of my customers will invest more if they know it will last longer."

Fidler says the hardest thing about starting and running a business is maintaining balance with family, giving credit to her 3 and 5-year-old children for keeping her grounded.

The home-based business does allow the entire family to get involved. Her auctioneer husband helps with packing and shipping as do the older children. They also help with accounting and customer service.

Fidler says her typing skills have come in handy, saving time with correspondence, emails and creating her website. Her high school business class has also been helpful, noting "you definitely need a knowledge of accounting."

She has learned to be careful about what she prays for. "We prayed for the blessing of a big business that would financially pay off, and boy did it ever," says Fidler. "It has gotten so big that we can't handle it ourselves anymore. We are looking for a fulltime person just for bookwork."

One benefit she sees in the home business and family involvement is that her children are learning to be entrepreneurs as well as bakers. The key, she says, in baking is to give the child their own ball of dough, rolling pins and pans. It appears the same is true of entrepreneurs as her 15-year-old daughter



Denise Fidler learned to bake fresh-milled, whole grain bread in Germany and later started a business to sell equipment to other bakers.

is now baking and selling her own bread each week.

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