

Shipping Container Coolers Cut Costs

Portable walk-in coolers are just the thing for small fruit and vegetable growers. They're normally exempt from property taxes and they can be moved to the field or sold if needs change.

But portable coolers are expensive. Gene Stampher, KOOLJET Refrigeration Systems, says he has just the answer. He sells cooling systems for ocean-going insulated shipping containers. Customers spend just a fraction of the price of new commercial coolers.

"Customers buy insulated decommissioned containers that may have been used for shipping frozen fish or other foods, cut a hole in them and slip in our cooling systems," says Stampher.

He reminds customers that any cooler being used for meats and such would need to be inspected. However, if previously used for food, they would likely be lined with

either stainless steel or aluminum for easy cleaning with a pressure washer.

Shipping containers come in 8 by 8 by 20 or 8 by 8 by 40-ft. sizes. If previously used for frozen goods, most will have about 4 in. of foam.

"We design systems for containers that actually freeze contents or just chill it," says Stampher. "We can take it down to -4°F (-20°C)."

The cost of a cooling system depends on a number of variables including insulation level, products to be cooled, humidity levels desired, speed of cooling needed, desired temperatures and outside conditions. If ambient temperatures fall below the desired cooler temperature, a unit may require a heater also. As a result, every system is custom designed.

Once the system has been designed, it's easy to install. The complete system is fac-

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tory-tested and does not require a refrigerator technician to install.

Even if a cooling system costs the same for a container as for a building of the same size, total savings can be considerable. "Used containers generally cost less than \$2,000," points out Stampher. "Try to put up a build-

ing for that."

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Horse Hotel A Profitable Sideline

People hauling horses across Indiana on I-70 can find a great place to stay for both themselves and their animals. Mike and Melinda Gerrish run a "horse hotel" that caters to horse lovers. They'll feed your horses and even clean out trailers, but owners have to fend for themselves.

"When we bought this place, I said it would be a great place for an overnight stop for people with horses," says Mike. "Melinda took the idea and ran with it. We had traveled across country with a horse so we knew how hard it is to find good accommodations."

At first, all they offered was stalls for the horses. People could hook campers up to electricity or pitch a tent. The Gerrishes also worked out a reduced rate at a local Best Western motel. Last year that changed.

"People wanted a place other than trailers to stay close to their horses," says Melinda. "We started with a bunkhouse in the barn, and last October we put up a log cabin."

The cabin has a queen size bed, a set of bunk beds and a sleeper sofa. It's air conditioned, heated and offers a TV, coffee maker and refrigerator. Otherwise, it is rustic with a portable toilet behind the cabin and bottled water on the inside. Shower facilities are down the road at a local truck stop.

Horses must have health papers in order, including Coggins results. Buckets get washed out with bleach water between uses, and facilities are kept clean and neat.

Prices are simple, too, at \$35 for a single person or \$52 for two or more. Horse stalls and turnouts are even less expensive at \$15 a head plus \$3/feeding.

"We have had visitors from 38 states and British Columbia, plus a professional polo player from Argentina," says Melinda. "Most business has come from our internet site, but we are also listed on the Horse Motels International horsemotel.com website."

In addition to the one-room cabin, facilities include 15 stalls, a turnout area, a round pen, a large riding area and a 220 by 320-ft.



Rooms rent for \$35 for a single person or \$52 for two or more. Horse stalls and turnouts cost \$15 a head plus \$3 per feeding.

arena. Several nearby veterinarians are on call. A camping area and campfire pit are also still available.

The Gerrishes are pleased with the level of business and are already considering putting up more cabins. "Both of us like to meet people and talk horses, so it has been an easy thing to do," says Mike.

The business also works well as a sideline to their careers. Melinda is an artist, special-

izing in Western art. Mike is in sales. In addition to the horse hotel, they put on horse clinics for kids, including a horse day camp. They also host birthday parties for kids with Mike doing cowboy magic.

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This Greenhouse Is For The Birds

While most people raise plants in greenhouses, Alvin Theriault raises jungle cock and genetic hackle, birds that are highly valued by fly fishermen. Theriault sells the feathers loose or as pelts and also sells flies he has tied himself, up to 10,000 a year.

"You need the feathers to tie the flies, and they don't last forever, so the feathers are always in demand," says Theriault, Stacyville, Maine.

He needs a source of feathers year-round. After determining that both breeds did better on dirt and with as much light as possible, he decided a greenhouse would be the answer.

University of Maine Extension poultry specialists told him a greenhouse wouldn't work, because it would be too humid. "They were thinking of controlled temperatures and watered plants," says Theriault. "Without plants and high heat, humidity is not a problem."

Maine snows would be a problem, though. He knew the greenhouse walls couldn't withstand snow sliding off the roof and piling up against the sides. His answer was to put the greenhouse on top of a dirt pad 3 to 4 ft. above surrounding ground level.

The commercial 27-ft. by 100-ft. greenhouse with a single layer of 15-mil poly-

ethylene covering it lets him keep up to 1,000 birds at a time. In the summer, he simply lifts the sidewalls to provide ample ventilation.

Cold winter temperatures and even wind have been no more of a problem than summer heat. Theriault credits the dirt floor for absorbing sunlight and releasing the heat over night.

"We get 20 below zero temperatures and yet the temperature at eye level in the greenhouse has never gotten below zero," says Theriault. "It would be even warmer if I had gone with a double layer of plastic with air in between for insulation like most greenhouses use."

In addition to selling the feathers and flies made from his greenhouse birds, Theriault also sells live jungle cock chicks and fertilized eggs, chicks, brooding hens and even adults. Genetic hackle fertile eggs sell for \$55/dozen while a hen with 10 eggs will sell for \$95.

He is one of the few breeders of either bird who sells breeding stock. The jungle cock are actually a type of rare pheasant crossed with domestic chickens. They are raised for their nail feathers.

Genetic hackle are a line of domestic chicken that has been bred from a variety of heritage breeds such as Thompson Barred Rock, Blue Andalusians and others. They have been bred for strips of feathers on the



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back of their necks (capes) and running down their backs (saddles). The various lines of genetic hackle available (Theriault keeps three lines) have been selected for color, length and other feather characteristics.

Theriault advises prospective breeders to learn what characteristics are most highly desired and how to breed for them. This requires knowing both poultry production and fly tying. The best birds have to be kept for breeding and not literally "killing the golden goose", he says.

In addition to the birds he raises, Theriault buys grouse feathers from area hunters. He also raises a number of other species for fly tying materials including Icelandic sheep, llamas, rabbits, guinea fowl and cashmere goats. He uses their hair, wool and pelts for tying flies and sells them to other fly tiers from a



Theriault raises birds to harvest their feathers. He ties flies for fly fishermen.

store on his farm, by phone, or from his mail order catalog. In addition, a neighbor sells many of Theriault's products at his eBay store, J&J's Flies.

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