

## Part-Time Aerial Photography Business

By C.F. Marley, Contributing Editor

Tony and Tina Ambrose, Pana, Ill., have come up with a high tech photography and video service involving the use of a radio-controlled helicopter and digital camera.

Their low-altitude aerial photography business is called Prairie Sky Cam. They opened for business last May and they've been plenty busy since then, although both continue to hold down full-time jobs elsewhere.

The couple travels with a trailer that contains everything needed for Prairie Sky Cam to go on location and shoot any kind of job.

The mini helicopter has a 6-ft. long rotor. Most photos are shot 100 to 350 ft. in the air. All aerial photos are saved in JPG format on a CD that's given to the customer.

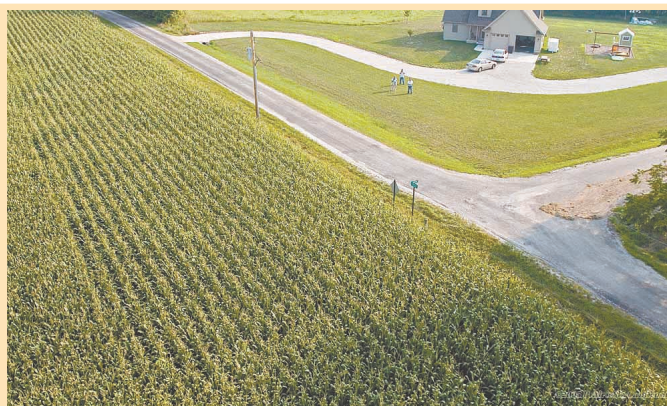
We photographed the helicopter close up and then asked Tony to fly the helicopter up into the air and photograph us down below. As Tony controls the helicopter, Tina uses a small TV monitor to show a live view of what the digital camera is seeing. If necessary, Tina can pan the camera from side to side or tilt it

up or down. When she sees the shot she wants on the monitor, she flips a switch on the controller to take the photo.

Tony and Tina have taken care of a lot of otherwise impossible photo jobs, and as word spreads about their service more jobs are coming in. They range from photographing land for sale to photographing private homes, newly built developments, and local businesses. Some people just want a good photo of their farmstead.

A one-hour session on site costs \$200, with \$100 for each additional hour on site. A one-hour video session on site per location costs \$350, with \$100 for each additional hour on site. A mileage charge is added outside a 30-mile radius of Pana.

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Here Tony Ambrose hovers the helicopter over a corn field while wife Tina sends the camera orders to photograph the people standing on the ground.



Tony demonstrates at low level (left) the control he has over the chopper. It's about 2 ft. above the ground. Tony and Tina travel with a trailer that contains everything needed to go on location and shoot any kind of job.



## "Slough Sticks" Make It Easy To Fence Through Water

Doug Schlosser and his sons, Kevin and Dan, farm at Punnichy, Sask., and wanted to avoid the unpleasant annual job of repairing or rebuilding fences in water-logged areas.

"When raising livestock, sometimes you have to fence across or into sloughs, ponds or lakes. For us, fixing fence with rusted-through wires, or wooden posts that have been pushed out of the ground or rotted, was never fun. "We decided to invent something that would eliminate the problem," Doug says.

After giving it much thought, the men made their own molds and began making the heavy-duty floating bases that are 20 in. across and 3 in. deep at the center. The base is made from hard foam that's coated with PVC plastic.

The post is a 3/8-in. fiberglass rod that slides into a sheath in the foam base. A cotter key holds the rod securely in place.

The resulting heavy-duty, but lightweight post is buoyant enough to hold up to two strands of fencing wire (barbed wire or smooth electric). The wires attach to the rod with conventional electric fence insulators.

Schlosser recommends spacing the "Slough Sticks", as they call them, 20 to 25 feet apart and says they can be installed a couple ways without getting wet.

"You can set it up in the winter months by just walking across the ice and setting the Slough Sticks where you want them. Then you anchor the wire on the shore at each end, and you're done," he explains. "Once the ice melts, the posts will float. For spring or summer installation, just lay the section of pre-assembled fence next to the water source you want to cross. Anchor one end and then pull the wires tight. The fence will pull itself into place and erect itself."

You can span any length of water and the fence will rise and fall with changing water levels.

Slough Sticks cost \$17.99 (Can.) plus shipping.

The inventor says they're strong enough to withstand normal wind and weather conditions. In the case of areas where extremely heavy winds are prevalent, Jaddak Creations also sells Slough Sticks with heavy-duty anchor wires on the bottom that prevent the fence from moving too far. All Slough Sticks can be left in place year-round.

Because they are designed to sit flat on the ground if the water dries up, other applications for this product include using them for



Heavy-duty floating bases are made from foam coated with PVC plastic. Lightweight posts set in bases and are buoyant enough to hold up to two strands of fencing wire.

swath grazing or for fencing around ponds. Schlosser says some of their customers have also used Slough Sticks to hang fish nets, to hold up water pump hoses, or as buoys.

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Schlosser recommends spacing posts 20 to 25 ft. apart. They can span any length of water and the fence will rise and fall with changing water levels.

## "The Little Potato Company"

As the name suggests, "The Little Potato Company" focuses on producing small potatoes but the specialty market it serves is continuing to grow, according to managing director Angela Santiago.

She says the company currently sells 4,000 tons per year of the potatoes that range between 3/4 in. and 1 5/8 in. in diameter. Anything larger is treated as culls.

The company serves both wholesale and retail markets, including the restaurant trade. It's the only company in North America specializing in growing small potatoes, Santiago says, "Gourmet quality potatoes."

It's also actively pursuing the development and enhancement of small potato varieties by working closely with Solanum International, a potato breeding and development company focusing on specialty potato varieties.

Company research shows that busy, sophisticated, urban consumers like baby potatoes.

"Because they're small, they cook quickly, and they're easy to prepare - there's no peeling required," Santiago says. "They're also perfect for diet conscious people who want nutrition and taste, but not bulk. Our small 2 lb. bag is perfect for one or two meal sittings."

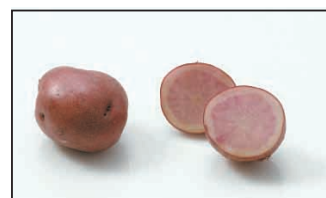
The company also markets a 1 1/2-lb. and a 5-lb. bag.

The Little Potato Company began operations in 1998, by planting about 130 acres of seed, which yielded 1.5 million lbs. The next year, they doubled their acreage, and they now grow 1,000 acres of gourmet potatoes. Twenty-five full time employees work in the plant and the office consists of nine full time people.

"We harvest with European machinery specifically designed for small potatoes. It handles the potatoes very gently, to minimize bruising and scarring. This is important for gourmet cooks, because one of the advantages of clean, well-formed small potatoes is that they are often served whole, without peeling," Santiago says.

The company's washing and packaging equipment is state of the art, and the final product is stringently monitored for size and quality.

She says they manage their inventory for maximum freshness - in such a way that the potatoes are kept in on-farm cold storage right



"Gourmet quality" baby potatoes range between 3/4 in. and 1 5/8 in. in diameter.



The small potatoes cook quickly and are easy to prepare, with no peeling required.

up until one week or less before delivery to retailers. Orders are typically filled within 48 hours.

They grow a colorful and diverse collection of potato varieties including: yellows ( Bintje, Baby Boomer and Piccolo), reds (Red Baby Boomer), blues (All Blue, a.k.a. Russian Blue), and a variety of weirdly shaped and colored exotics (sold to restaurants only). These exotics include: Banana Fingerling (a.k.a. Russian Fingerling), Pink Fir Apple, French Fingerling, and All Red.

"Our product is available year round, with the exception of our organic and exotic lines," Santiago says. "Those are only available from October to mid-January because they don't store as well."

Santiago says the company's 2-lb. bags sell for an average retail price that's between \$3.49 and \$3.99.

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