

Custom-Built Grain Bagger Good For Business

"I'm a custom combiner, so offering a grain bagging service extended my season by three weeks to a month," says Tony Tolsma of Millet, Alta.

His amazing home-built unit has a grain roller built in, and is used to pack either dry or high moisture grain into plastic silage bags.

"Commercial pto-driven grain baggers on the market are hard to use. You're always moving augers and trucks in front of them. This one is a totally self-contained unit with a 700-bu. surge tank."

Before bagging, high moisture grain is cut at 20 to 35 percent moisture. Once placed in the sealed bags, it ferments and results in a highly palatable cattle feed.

Tony's brother, Art Tolsma helped build and design the rig. Its average capacity is

between 1,200 and 1,500 bu./hr., but Tony says he has bagged up to 1,800 bu./hr.

"This unit is designed for custom work or big operations, but a person could build a smaller version," he says. "It has its own motor and hydraulic system, using a rebuilt 225 hp, 466 Deere motor taken from an 8820 Deere combine. This runs a 12 by 52-in. roller mill as well as the hydraulic system. It's built on a hi-boy trailer, so it's easy to transport. The tunnel that the bag goes on extends off the back of the trailer and lifts hydraulically for transport."

The bagger has a 13-in. auger that unloads the truck into its 700-bu. surge bin. From there, there's a 12-in. auger feeding the roller mill. Under the roller mill, is a 21-in. auger that pushes grain into the tunnel.

"This grain bagger works good for anyone



Self-contained unit has a 700-bu. surge tank. Its average capacity is between 1,200 and 1,500 bu./hr.

feeding TMR rations because those farmers can just load out of both grain bags and silage bags," Tolsma says.

He built his machine about five years ago and says the substantial rig cost about \$150,000 to build.

Tolsma is interested in the possibility of hooking up with a manufacturer.

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Washington Grower Makes A Profit Farming Bamboo

By Dawn Throener, Associate Editor

In 1997, FARM SHOW published a story about bamboo farming and an Oregon farmer trying to make a go of it (Vol. 21, No. 2). When he eventually got out of the business, we continued to get calls looking for more information. So we recently set out to find another bamboo farmer who knew what's happening with this unique "crop."

Wade Bennett, owner of Rockridge Orchards & Bamboo Grove in Enumclaw, Wash., understands bamboo because he's been growing different varieties since 1989.

Bennett says bamboo's popularity started growing in 1997 after a forest and timber conference held in Washington brought out a lot of "alternative lifestyle" people. Many were unprepared for the time and labor involved to grow bamboo. "Those who weren't professional farmers washed out. The people who knew how to grow things for a living succeeded, and succeeded fairly well," Bennett says.

He started growing bamboo because the Cambodian workers he employs said bamboo would be great for supporting newly growing trees in his pear orchard.

He now grows 5 1/2 acres of bamboo on his 40-acre farm east of Tacoma and Seattle. "I'm within 15 minutes of about 2

million people," he says.

Bamboo is a multipurpose plant that can be used for everything from food to furniture. It grows like grass but looks more like trees. "Any place that grass will grow well, most of the hardy temperate timber bamboos will grow," Bennett says. They're hardy to about 0 degrees but some varieties can handle 20 below zero degree temps.

Some bamboo grows as tall as a silo. "I've got bamboo here that grows up to 54 ft. tall. The big bamboo will also get as wide as someone's leg in dia.," he says.

But bamboo doesn't always grow that tall or wide. "The problem with bamboo is that it's very site and weather climate specific. What grows 50 ft. tall here in western Washington, might grow to 70 ft. tall in Oregon or 5 ft tall in Texas," Bennett says.

Bennett sells all parts of the bamboo plant. The shoots are served as a garnish in high-end five-star restaurants. He also sells it to some brokers for Asian grocery stores. The bench price for bamboo shoots is \$2.50 per lb. It retails for between \$5 and \$6.

The poles and canes are sold to furniture makers. Prices for cane depends on dia., straightness and quality. A 4-in. dia. cane that's 12 ft. is worth about \$45.

Small poles and scraps sell as stakes to hold up flowers and other plants. During the win-

ter, the Bennetts sell new plants to mail order nursery houses. Depending on the species, they sell for about \$35 and \$100.

"The return on a bamboo grove is \$15,000 to \$18,000 wholesale per acre. We don't have to do any advertising at this point. Customers find us," he says.

Bamboo has very few insect or disease problems. The plants need irrigating during mid-summer because it's hot and wet during the summer where these plants are from. Other than that, they're pretty carefree.

Bamboo doesn't like salt fertilizers so farmers need to use a lot of organic materials to keep up its growth. It sprouts new canes every spring or summer and those canes, depending on the age of the grove, can grow a few inches per day to a few ft. per day. "We have a few Japanese varieties that are capable of topping out at 50 plus ft. in 30 days," he says.

Harvesting the shoots is done manually and is similar to harvesting asparagus. It's fairly labor intensive. Cutting the full-grown canes is more like cutting wood. Harvesting whole plants, on the other hand, is done with a back hoe.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Rockridge Orchards & Bamboo Groves, 41127 - 212nd Ave. SE, Enumclaw, Wash. 98022 (ph 360 825-1962). Or visit the Wash-



© 2004 Washington State University Small Farms Team. "The return on a bamboo grove is \$15,000 to \$18,000 wholesale per acre," says Wade Bennett.

ington State University, Vancouver Research & Extension Center's website: <http://agsyst.wsu.edu/bamboo.htm>.

Dog Taxi Business Pays Off For Retired Breeder

Girard Burgess, Athol, Idaho, laughs when he tells people he's retired. A dog breeder and trainer for over 25 years, he now spends his time on the road, hauling dogs and pups around the country.

Burgess runs a business called "The Dog Taxi" using a 1999 Ford Expedition and a home-built 10-dog trailer.

He's licensed in Idaho and inspected, certified and governed by the Department of Transportation. The Department of Agriculture also has laws, licenses and legal requirements of its own.

Unfortunately, right now, anyone with a van or pickup can throw a few carriers on and start transporting dogs, he warns.

In May, he drove over 1,200 miles, spent over \$2,000 in fuel, and was on the road for 21 days. While on the road, he uses his cell phone to keep in touch with customers. He spends about 14 hours driving each day and sleeps a few hours in the truck. Every third

day, he sleeps in a hotel.

Once he has the dogs on the road, they're the priority. He likes to carry about 6 at a time but can handle up to 10. Dogs are kenneled in back but puppies are kept inside the vehicle in a couple enclosed carriers. "All puppies get motion sickness the first time they're transported," he says, adding that he gives them plenty of water to keep them hydrated. "They also like the added attention."

Every two hours, he stops and checks all the animals to water them and change their pine shaving bedding as needed. Every 4 to 6 hrs., he stops to exercise and feed them Purina dog food in addition to watering and cleaning the pens.

Burgess charges 35 cents per mile from pickup to delivery points up to 1,000 miles. Any mileage after that is an additional \$350 per dog. He has a multiple dog discount if the pickup and delivery are both to one location.



Burgess uses a 1999 Ford Explorer and home-built dog trailer to haul up to 10 dogs at once.

In order to eliminate the hassle of dealing with banks while on the road, Burgess deals only in cash. He gets half at the time of pickup and the other half at delivery time.

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