

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income



Phyllis and Tony Athmann whitewash 400 barns per year, on average.

Photo courtesy Mark Klaphaki/Dairy Star

Demand Strong For Barn Whitewashing

Whitewashing has been a great business for Phyllis and Tony Athmann of Sauk Centre, Minn.

In fact, Phyllis has worked in this trade for 23 years in all – 10 years for another operator, and then another 13 years when she and her husband started their business, “Gibbs Whitewashing”.

From April until November each year, the couple travels around Minnesota and into S. Dakota, whitewashing the interiors of 400 barns per year, on average. The majority are dairy barns, with some hog and chickens barns mixed in, and fall is always the busiest season.

Their mobile business consists of a 1-ton flatbed truck, equipped with an air compressor (118 lbs. of pressure), an 85-gal. tank to mix the whitewash, a pump to spray it out, 250 ft. of hose on each unit, a long-handled metal scraper, and tool boxes.

Phyllis starts cleaning the barns by blowing the dust and cobwebs out, using the air compressor and the hose with a 6-ft. copper tubing wand at the end.

“It’s a very dirty job, so I wear a special helmet with a clear plastic face mask and a motor on the back of it to supply clean air,” she says. “It keeps the dust and whitewash chips out of my face, but at times, it’s very hot to wear. While I blow, Tony scrapes manure off the posts and walls.”

On some barns with metal sheeting, the Athmanns do some power washing. (Whitewash is only applied to wood surfaces.) Most of their customers hire them every year or every other year, since regu-

lar maintenance is necessary to keep barns sanitary and satisfy inspectors.

The couple get up at 5 a.m. to start their day. Although the majority of jobs are close enough that they can go home at night, the couple also travels up to a couple of hundred miles away, staying in hotels.

“We clean barns at least nine hours a day, and schedule our next jobs in the evening when we get back. In the fall, we leave in the dark and come home in the dark.”

Before Phyllis can begin blowing a barn, they have to cover the cow’s drinking cups. While she runs the air compressor, Tony covers fuse boxes, windows, light switches, the milk pipeline, and anything else that shouldn’t be sprayed.

“We have fun and laugh a lot. I grew up on a dairy farm so I love the fact that I’m out in the country,” Phyllis says. “Farmers are really nice. I’ve always said we work for the best people there are to work for.”

Whitewash is a white, clay powder that comes from mines in West Virginia. It’s a less expensive, shorter lasting and more natural way than paint to make barn interiors white. It comes in 50-lb. bags, each of which is mixed with 16 gal. of water.

“We charge customers seven cents per square foot for local jobs,” she explains.

The Athmanns retired and sold their business a few months ago to Nick Meyer. It’s now called Meyer Whitewashing.

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Gypsy horses have silky feathered legs, long flowing manes, and often bold color patterns. They’re built like small draft horses and are said to be great with children.

Gypsy Horses A Hot Commodity

The centuries old Gypsy Horse breed has silky feathered legs, long flowing manes, and often bold color patterns. The horses are built like small draft horses and bred to be graceful, with an extremely gentle and willing temperament.

According to breeder Kim Swaisgood of Evenstar Farms at Conesus, N.Y., Gypsy Horses originated in Ireland and Great Britain, and descended from English Shires, Clydesdales, Irish Draughts, Dales Ponies and Fell Ponies. They range in size from 12H to over 16H, and come in a variety of colors. In the U.S., however, they are more commonly black and white with a tobiano pattern, or solid black.

They’re also called Irish Tinkers, Gypsy Vanners, Gypsy Cobs, Irish Cobs, Romany Cobs, Drums, and Travelers’ Horses, just to name a few.

The breed’s history is colorful, as it was developed by travelers (gypsies) who needed hardy, athletic, and reliable horses to pull the caravan homes used in their nomadic lifestyle. Gypsy Horses also had to be patient and gentle with children, as they often kept the family’s youngsters amused.

Swaisgood says today’s Gypsy Horses are ideal for many purposes:

“Whether you’re looking for a child’s horse, a trail buddy, a beautiful dressage horse or an athletic jumper, this is the horse of your dreams,” she says. “For our own needs, we found that it’s perfect for the medieval gaming competitions we’re involved in, and for our medieval education program. We had researched several breeds, and although each breed had traits that would fill our “horse order,” none of them seemed to have everything we wanted. This breed has beauty,



The horses come in a variety of colors but are commonly black and white with a tobiano pattern.

brains, build, stamina, ability, a willing temperament and is great with children.”

People began importing Gypsy Horses into the U.S in recent years, and in 2003, the Gypsy Cob Society of America, Inc., was founded. Other American groups dedicated to this breed include the Gypsy Cob and Drum Horse Association, the Gypsy Vanner Horse Society, and the American Drum Horse Association.

In all, Swaisgood estimates there are probably about 800 registered Gypsy horses in the U.S. today. The majority of these horses were imported from overseas and it’s only in the last couple of years that foals have been produced here for sale.

Breeding quality fillies or colts sell for \$10,000 to \$15,000, mares for \$18,000 to \$20,000, and proven breeding stallions for \$30,000 to \$40,000. These prices are for animals with little to no training.

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Garlic Hobby Leads To Business

When Herrick Kimball started growing garlic, the idea of supplying a gourmet restaurant with garlic powder had not even entered his mind. Six years later, he has learned to dry and powder garlic using a dryer of his own design, and he has customers asking for more than he can produce.

“Most of my sales are word of mouth,” he explains. “Someone gets a gift and calls for more. This year my aunt gave some to a gourmet restaurant, and they were ecstatic over it. They wanted more, but I was just about sold out, so they took my last few ounces.”

Last year’s crop was about 1,200 bulbs. They are all German White, a variety that consistently produces large cloves.

“If you are going to grow garlic, the larger the cloves, the easier it is to dry and make powder,” he says.

Kimball has outlined garlic production, drying and powder making, as well as the health benefits of garlic, in his book, “The Complete Guide To Making Great Garlic

Powder”.

One practice that is not in his book is a drying chamber he used this past season. Although it can be made to any size, he used available materials, including some 2 by 6’s he had in his shed. The base is a plywood box approximately 24 by 48 by 20 in. A large space on one end allows a house fan to be placed inside to direct air upwards. The 2 by 6-in. boards form 2 by 4-ft. trays with chicken netting stapled to them for bottoms.

“The 2 by 6’s are probably heavier than I needed but by using them, there is less chance of warping, and they leave more room for attaching the poultry netting,” he says. “Most of all, they are what I had around.”

In the past he had simply hung the garlic in a drying shed. The drier provided better airflow and works much faster.

Kimball first cuts off the tops and then fills the shelf units. After about a week, the bulbs are ready to process. After setting aside what he needs for replanting, he cleans and prepares the remainder for sale. Some are sold as fresh bulbs, while others are prepared for



Herrick Kimball learned to dry and powder garlic using a dryer of his own design.

the transition to powder.

“Homemade garlic production can be profitable,” says Kimball. “I am thinking of expanding as my kids are getting older and can help more. You don’t need a lot of room, and there are a lot of markets. There are many ways it can be used in dips and mixes.”

To help would-be garlic marketers, Kimball has a website where his book (\$6.95) and a special report on setting up a garlic business can be ordered.

“The website also has links to other sources



of information on garlic and stories about it,” says Kimball. “The report talks about how to package and market garlic powder and sources for packaging.”

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