

## Fiber Business Pays Off For Rural Woman

When Lynda Carothers opened Carothers Country Fiber Mill, she expected to keep busy processing wool and hair from sheep, llamas and alpacas. What surprised her was the unusual requests that have come her way.

"We once got 50 lbs. of bearded collie hair that we processed and blended with 10 percent sheep wool for a customer," says Carothers. Another customer brought her a load of buffalo hair.

With the help of her daughter and son, she washes, dries, picks, cards, and spins fibers for herself and a growing number of customers.

"I get llama and alpaca fiber from all over the country due in part to my 15 years of experience breeding llamas," explains Carothers. "Most of the mohair and sheep fleece I get comes from the five-state upper Midwest."

It was her breeding of Argentinean llamas that got Carothers thinking about processing fibers. The breed is noted for producing a very high quality fiber similar to alpaca and two to three times the amount of other common llamas. She has one of

the largest Argentinean llama herds in the U.S. Much in demand, bred females sell for \$7,500 to \$10,000 and breeding males for \$5,000 to \$8,000.

After years of long wait times to have her fiber processed, she saw an opportunity to get into the business. In less than a year, she has built up a backlog of customers waiting to be processed. Her spinning orders alone have a four-month wait.

Carothers reports that while small fiber mills are springing up around the country, there is still plenty of excess demand. She credits the expansion of small flocks as well as growing interest in fiber craft and art.

When she decided to start her business, Carothers had a couple of advantages. In addition to her reputation in the llama industry, she had worked in merchandising and marketing for a sweater retailer. Even so, her first step was to work with a local small business adviser to develop a business plan. The plan helped her get a loan from the Small Business Administration.

"It was a long process, but it was worth it," says Carothers.

While some of her \$100,000 in equipment

was new, she also took advantage of larger mills that were going out of business in this country due to foreign competition. She was able to buy a used 24-head spinner for the same price as a new spinner with 1/3 the capacity.

"The biggest challenge was getting used equipment up and running, and getting training on it is difficult," says Carothers. "We had to have a man come from Ontario to repair it when we had problems."

At this point, she is slowly learning to operate the complicated machine, using only four of the 24 heads and spinning only about 4 lbs. a day. Eventually she plans to be spinning about 20 lbs. a day.

Carothers herself continues to do felting and other crafts with her llama fiber while processing for others. She encourages others to consider setting up a similar small business.

"There is no shortage of business to go around," she says. "You can purchase smaller equipment or large, new or used. It all depends on your planned output."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Carothers Country Fiber Mill, 23798



Lynda Carothers invested \$100,000 to start her fiber business. One customer brought her 50 lbs. of dog hair.

Whitman Deering Drive, Minnesota City, Minn. 55959 (ph 507 689-2677; Lynda@CarothersCountryFarm.com; www.carotherscountryfarm.com).

## Poultry Raising, Processing Products

If you're looking to get into small scale poultry production, you'll need some equipment. Here are a few companies that'll help get you started.

### Pakster

Their egg baskets are made from high density polyethylene and are designed to enclose and protect eggs. The smooth surface makes nesting and denesting easy. The baskets will withstand repeated washings and are resistant to detergents and disinfectants. They're available in several colors to blend into any color scheme. The straight side wall makes it easy to pack eggs without fear of breakage. An interlocking design assures firm, secure stacking of baskets. The baskets accommodate 12 or 18-egg cartons as well as standard egg flats. Holes in the bottom allow easy removal of stacked egg flats.

The baskets are easily converted from the stacked position to the nested position by turning them 180 degrees.

The company's coops make bird loading

### Cryovac Poultry Bag

This company makes bags for home processing. They measure 9 by 16 in. and hold up to a 6 1/2-lb. bird. You put a bird in a bag, dip it in 200 degree water, and the bag shrinks around the bird. Even if the bag is punctured, it will stay tight around the product. Helps prevent freezer burn and ice crystals from forming on the product.

Cost is about 18 cents per bag plus S&H.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Cryovac Food Packaging, 100 Rogers Bridge Rd., Duncan, S.C. 29334 (ph 800



Interlocking baskets hold egg cartons or standard egg flats.

safe, quick and easy. They have smoothly rounded corners to minimize bruising and wing injuries. The coops are designed with a positive top-and-bottom interlocking system to make the load secure.

The company also makes egg flats and chick boxes.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Pakster, 2008 Dennis St., Athens, Tenn. 37303 (ph 800 367-6549; info@pakster.com; www.pakster.com).



Bags shrink tightly around processed birds.

391-5645; fax 864 433-2134; www.sealedair.com/products/food/poultry/805bags.html).

### Gillis Agricultural Systems

Gillis sells all kinds of equipment for raising free range poultry. Their mail order catalog features feed bins and augers, poultry floor feeding systems, bell and nipple drinker systems, hanging feeders and waterers, natural ventilation curtain systems, pens and range equipment, incubators, brooders, and heaters.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Gillis Agricultural Systems, Inc., P.O. Box 250, Willmar, Minn. 56201 (ph 800 992-8986 or 320 235-0444; fax 320 235-0461; www.gillisag.com).



You can order this free catalog online or by calling the company.



Darren Guard says Berkshire hogs take about 10 percent longer to grow and reach about 80 percent of the size of a conventional breed.

## Kurobuta Is "The Kobe Beef Of Pork"

Snake River Farms of Boise, Idaho is the largest producer of American Kobe beef. The company recently expanded to also produce a specialty premium pork known as "Kurobuta".

Snake River exports about half its Kurobuta to Asian countries, including Japan. Like Kobe beef, it has a reputation for rich flavor, texture and juiciness – traits attributed to the deep marbling of the meat.

Although Kobe and Kurobuta's share of the overall beef and pork markets is still tiny, they have been embraced by influential restaurants and retailers and provide a popular alternative for high-income consumers. Market share has been steadily increasing as the company targets high-profile chefs and word of mouth spreads.

Kurobuta pork comes from Berkshire hogs – also known as the "Japanese black hog," since the Japanese word Kurobuta means "black pig." The breed has been produced in Japan and celebrated there as a highly prized meat since the 19th century.

Snake River Farms raises only 100 percent purebred Berkshire hogs.

"Berkshire hogs are inefficient animals but are raised for the superior eating qualities of their meat," says Darren Guard of Snake River. "The hogs take about 10 percent longer to grow and only reach about 80 percent of the size of a conventional breed. However, the meat is known for its fine flecks of marbling and outstanding taste and texture."

Midwest farmers contract with the com-

pany to produce the hogs, which retail for up to three times more than conventional pork. However, North American Kurobuta prices are still only a fraction of the cost of comparable products in Japan, according to Guard.

Dubbed "the other red meat," Kurobuta pork has a darker (deep pink) color than regular commercial white pork. Its deep marbling has moisture retention properties, and is responsible for much of this meat's additional juiciness and flavor.

According to the company's website, the American Berkshire Association (ABA) became the nation's first swine registry in 1875 and has maintained pedigree records ever since. The breed was first introduced to Japan by a gift from the British government in the 19th century.

"Taste tests comparing American Kurobuta pork (Berkshire) to other common pork varieties consistently show that consumers prefer Kurobuta. In fact, the National Pork Producers Council conducted a taste test using 25 quality traits, and Kurobuta pork ranked #1 in 19 of them, including tenderness and juiciness," according to the company.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Snake River Farms, Corporate Headquarters, 1555 Shoreline Drive, Third Floor, Boise, Idaho 83702 (ph 208 338-2500 or 800 657-6305; fax 208 338-2605; customerservice@snakeriverfarms.com; www.snakeriverfarms.com).