

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

If you're looking for new ways to add to your bottom line, take a look at the money-making ideas featured here and on the next page.

If you've found or heard about a new income-boosting idea, we'd like to hear about it. Send details to: FARM SHOW Magazine, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 800 834-9665) or email us at: editor@farmshow.com.



Donna Smith and Robyn Streeter started a business raising gardens in customers' yards. For a flat fee, they'll set up raised garden beds with soil and compost that they haul in.

"Yard Farming" Business

Yard farming may be the next great "green" revolution. Donna Smith and Robyn Streeter have figured out how to make the idea pay for their business, Your Backyard Farmer.

"I was driving out to look for land to rent for raising vegetables when I looked at all the lawns I was driving by, and a light came on," recalls Smith. "Why look outside of town when there is land right here."

Smith went home and talked to her business partner, Streeter. They drew up a flier and started posting it around their neighborhood. Instead of selling shares in a market garden and delivering produce to customers, they offered to set up gardens in customers' own yards.

"By the time I got home, the phone was already ringing with people who were interested," says Smith.

For a flat fee, the two professional gardeners go to homes in the fall and rip out the sod. They set up raised garden beds with soil and compost they haul in. While she acknowledges they could try to build up the soil that is there, the host/customers expect full production from year one. The best way to do that is with already enhanced soil, notes Smith.

"We provide the seeds and seedlings they want and plant them in the spring, adding mushroom compost and other goodies throughout the year," she says.

One of the first things the two do is set up a compost container for kitchen and gar-

den scraps. "We believe that no garden should be without a compost system in place," says Smith. "We show the customer how to maintain it."

Pricing is based on the area farmed with a minimum size of 400 sq. ft. Some neighbors go together to form a mini farm on a larger plot of available land. In one case, 12 families share a garden on land belonging to one. Sometimes next-door neighbors will go together to reach a minimum size plot.

"Our lowest price is \$1,575 for the 9-month season," says Streeter. "That includes the set up, all the seeds and seedlings, planting, and weekly visits to weed, do maintenance and pick and wash the vegetables."

This year they had 50 full service customers and another 50 customers they consult with for a fee of \$100 each month. These are people who would like to garden, but have no experience. They pay Smith and Streeter to design a garden and teach them to manage it.

These consulting clients get a monthly visit from the partners, a manual and a lesson each month for nine months.

"We go over what needs to be done the coming month, bring in seeds and transplants as needed, teach them about how and when to plant and transplant, and about soils, diseases, pests and compost," explains Smith. "Each month there is a special component, such as watering and soils amendments. We leave them with materials and jobs to do for the month ahead."



Bill Schwandt built buggies for his miniature horses to pull and books them for anniversary parties, birthdays and other celebrations.

Mini Horses Pull Buggies To Entertain

"I didn't realize I'd enjoy miniature horses as much as I do," says Bill Schwandt of Morton, Minn. He owns 25 tiny horses that are no more than 38 in. tall. He built buggies for them to pull a cart and books them for anniversary parties, birthdays and other celebrations for a small fee.

Schwandt purchased his first miniature horses after an accident in 1997. When cleaning the snow off his machine shed, he fell and broke his back. The next month he sold his dairy cows.

After he recovered he felt a void. "I needed some chores," Schwandt says. "When you're used to taking care of cows all your life, it was like losing friends."

He decided to try horses - just two miniatures that would be easy to handle. Though they were small they proved to be addictive. The herd grew.

"I've probably got too many, but I have hay and crops. And I still have my old dairy barn," Schwandt says. The horses are very hardy, but he puts them inside at night during the winter. Feed costs for the 250 to 350-lb. horses are reasonable. A small square hay bale lasts a mini horse a week,

and they only need a few oats.

But other costs are just as much for mini horses as they are for full-size horses, Schwandt says. He has trained 12 of the horses to pull a cart and invested in harnesses, custom collars and a 28-ft. live-stock trailer to take them and his two homemade buggies to events. The miniature horses need vaccinations and the same health program as all horses.

"They have a mind of their own, but they aren't hard to train to drive," Schwandt says. "It's a matter of hooking them up and doing it. I have stallions that I've broken to drive."

Raising miniature horses is not a cheap hobby, Schwandt adds. While some of the horses can be purchased for \$200, they often range between \$500 and \$1,000.

For more information about miniature horses, Schwandt suggests going to the American Miniature Horse Association website at www.amha.org.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bill Schwandt, 39428 310th St., Morton, Minn. 56270 (ph 507 249-3833).

For those who are interested, the partners have taken their business another step. They also consult with and have helped 16 other entrepreneurs start their own version of Your Backyard Farmer.

"We do that for a straight fee per hour," says Smith. "We email and phone back and forth, or they can come and work directly

with us for hands-on training. Eventually we will put out a book."

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Roadside Firewood Business

Robert Crouthamel sells firewood to customers who pick it up at the end of his driveway. He had a problem with some people stealing the wood if it was left out overnight, so he made a simple wooden "forklift" that mounts inside the bucket on his Deere 318 garden tractor. It lets him haul 30-in. sq. wooden crates filled with firewood out each day, then bring the leftover wood back to his yard at the end of the day.

"I built 18 of these crates and pre-load each one with 75 pieces of wood, so when people come for wood it's already counted out," says Crouthamel, of Milford, Penn.

The forklift consists of a pair of 2 by 10 pressure-treated boards sandwiched between cross-mounted boards inside the bucket. A short 2 by 6 board at the center

fits against the top of the bucket and holds the boards in place as weight is placed on them. A pair of bolts, one inserted through each side of the bucket, keep the boards from being pulled out as the driver backs away.

"I'm 75 years old with limited vision because of macular degeneration. I can't weld any more which is why I made the forklift out of wood," says Crouthamel. "I spray painted the tip of each 2 by 10 board so that it would be easier for me to see."

A log chained to the back of the tractor serves as a counterweight.

The tractor is fitted with a Cozy Cab that wasn't made for Crouthamel's garden tractor so he modified the mounting brackets. He also installed a windshield wiper. He uses a 12-volt hair dryer to defrost the windshield during the winter. "The tractor's battery



Crouthamel stacks firewood inside 30-in. sq. wood crates and hauls them to the end of his driveway each day.

doesn't have enough amperage to handle the 12-volt dryer, so I mounted a jump start on the tractor and hook the dryer up to it. The dryer permanently mounts on the cab's roof and blows down toward the windshield,"

notes Crouthamel.

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