Machine Spins Out Shelled Nuts Fast

"My wife got tired of swinging a hammer," explains Michael Andreasen as his motivation for creating his Get Crackin™ nut-cracking machine. Walnuts are plentiful in the Boise, Idaho, area. Laid off from his job due to illness and with lots of available time, Andreasen used his skills in food processing equipment to make a prototype.

His patented machine is a spinning cone (small end up) in a stationary cylinder. Nuts fall between the two, according to their width, and are cracked with even pressure. The nutmeat and shells fall down a chute into a container. Andreasen is working on adding an air leg, to blow shells off to separate them from the nut, similar to blueberry separators.

"I can run 400 to 600 lbs. of walnuts an hour, 300 lbs. of pecans, or 500 lbs. of hazelnuts an hour," Andreasen says. Without any adjustments, he nets up to 65 percent halves on walnuts and pecans and up to 85 percent whole hazel nuts.

"I even get a high yield on macadamia nuts, which are harder to shell than black walnuts," he adds. He can crack any round nut; flat-sided Brazil nuts are more difficult.

While attending food shows, nut company representatives told him that without him knowing it, his machine is similar to quality commercial machines used by large nut companies. He also listened to ideas from average consumers and modified his prototype.

Get Crackin' is small enough to sit on a countertop or shop bench and comes in hand-crank and electric models. They're made of structural aluminum and can be anodized to be harder than stainless.

"This is great for an entrepreneur or home business. It's a food grade machine. You can use this for business," Andreasen says. Nut farmers often sell part of their crop to bakeries and small businesses. Even cracking nuts for individuals at 25 cents a pound could be a lucrative business, he adds.

Nut cracker consists of a spinning cone inside a stationary cylinder. Nuts fall between the two, according to their width, and are cracked with even pressure.

Andreasen builds the machines himself and has crank models (about $1,800) and motorized models (about $2,500) on hand. He also has more expensive models with cracking tolerance (adjust for nut size), which increases the percentage of half and whole nuts.

He has plans to add bins that size nuts and automate the system for optimal yield.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, In a Nutshell, Inc., Michael Andreasen, 11341 Hall Dr., Nampa, Idaho 83651 (ph 208 880 5487).

Jordan Gogerty loads round bales onto a conveyor while his wife, Sabrina, operates the bale shredder from the control booth.

Off-Season Square Bale-Making Business

Baling hay is a job for all seasons on Tim Gogerty's Hubbard, Iowa, farm. He makes big round bales in the summer and turns them into more marketable small square bales in the winter, working inside a 36 by 80-ft. hoop building.

Key to success of the rebaling operation is a round bale "unroller" he bought from Simpco, Inc., Cochran, Georgia (ph 478 934-7863; www.simpsonunroller.com).

The unroller consists of four conveyor units that unroll the bale and then fluff up the hay or straw before feeding it into the pickup. One person with a front-end loader sets bales onto the first conveyor and cuts the twine off. A second person runs the hydraulic levers that control the unrolling operation.

Tim's son Jordan built an 8 by 12-ft. control room located next to the unroller. It's insulated to provide sound-proofing and protect the unroller operator from dust. A large fan blows dust out the open ends of the building and flexible pipe attached to the tractor exhaust carries away diesel fumes.

In addition to the hay made on his own 80 acres of alfalfa, Gogerty buys good quality round bales to maintain his production schedule.

"I round bale most of my acreage because it's faster than handling small square bales. By rebaling we can make small bales when we have more time, and also end up with better quality hay," says Gogerty.

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Metal Worker Expert Handcrafts "Big Art"

Long after he's gone, Mike Beaudoin's steelwork will welcome visitors to ranches, mark the passing of loved ones and offer places to sit in a park. The Weyburn, Saskatchewan, man uses a plasma cutter - hand controlled, not computerized - to create metal signs and artwork for his clients.

"People have an image of what matters to them," Beaudoin explains. "Sometimes they have a photo. They give me full rein to create from that."

With some signs stretching up to 66 ft. long, the metal artist usually works outside to weld his artwork together. He deals with nature's elements, whether it's summer heat or 40 below zero in the winter.

"I like to use old machinery or old steel that's 1/4 to 3/8 in. thick and solid steel pipe," Beaudoin says. In the heart of oil country, he picks up old oil tanks and other metal inexpensively whenever he can. "Lots of time people have material themselves."

For example, Beaudoin has incorporated reins from a family's original horse team. He's used wagon wheels, tractor seats and horseshoes. The art is personal - such as a silhouette of a family at a rodeo

While Beaudoin enjoys the challenge of big art work, he also likes working with his wife, Debbie, who helps design memorial benches. Many are 6 to 8 ft. long and weigh up to 600 lbs., such as an angel bench for a cemetery or a memorial bench at a hunting club.

Mike Beaudoin uses a hand-controlled plasma cutter to create metal signs and artwork. Some signs stretch up to 66 ft. long.

Beaudoin has hand drawn and cut everything from bison to entire ranch scenes with horses, people, wagons and houses. He hasn't done any advertising, but he stays busy through word of mouth. Besides creating pieces for locals, he does commissioned pieces for tourists from Canada and the U.S. Pieces are left natural or finished with paints or plastic coatings.

Beaudoin credits his skills to his father, who was a farmer and blacksmith who made and fixed equipment.

"I started welding when I was six years old," Beaudoin says, adding that he was always more interested in the artistic side of metalwork. One of his favorite pieces is the grave marker he made for his parents. His father's old anvil supports two hearts with "Love Forged in Steel" written in his mother's handwriting.

"My work is all hand-crafted and designed to last for decades," Beaudoin says. "That's what I work for, that it becomes a family heirloom."

Prices range from a few hundred dollars for small pieces to $30,000 for huge signs. Beaudoin notes that shipping costs are reasonable to anywhere in the U.S. and Canada. He does the artwork and provides plans for a local welder to assemble it on site.

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