He Makes Money Selling Wood Processor Plans On eBay

High school ag teacher Daniel Miller built a firewood processor that loads, cuts and splits firewood and then started selling do-it-yourself plans for the machine on eBay. So far he's sent plans to people in 37 states and five countries.

"The idea was to build it out of basic parts that can be purchased anywhere," Miller explains. He kept notes and took photos to record the building process and even incorporated it into a lesson for his students.

Since then he's made revisions, modifying and improving his plans, while still keeping it flexible. For example, Miller upgraded from a spring-loaded arm to hydraulics to hold the log down as it's being cut. But he left the less expensive spring-loaded arm option in the plan.

He sells his plans, which include 70 photos, for $24.95 for a downloadable PDF file or $32 for a CD. A sample of the plans is on Miller's website. In the future he plans to offer plans for other woodcutting tools such as a firewood-bundle wrapping machine, wood conveyor to attach to the processor for quick loading, a log splitter to attach to a tractor's 3-pt. hitch and a log cart for an ATV to skid logs.

People who buy his plans often have their own ideas, Miller notes, and use his plans as a base or comparison. He doubts that any two machines built from the plan are alike.

"It's not a complicated machine at all," he says, and he includes a "this is a homemade machine" disclaimer so people understand it won't work like an expensive factory-made unit. The plans come with digital photos and step-by-step instructions.

Daniel Miller developed a profitable sideline using eBay.

Miller says his processor is not fast enough for some and admits he needs to upgrade his 10 hp engine to 16 hp to reduce up to half the time. It could also be converted to run off a pto. The small engine cuts and splits a cord every three hours, which is about the same as cutting with a chainsaw. "But it's a lot less labor," he says.

Using some scrap parts, he spent $1,600 for his splitter, but estimates it costs $2,500 to make with all new parts.

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Successful Corn Snack Result Of Ethanol Experiment

The corn Stan Friesen grows on his Minnesota farm can end up in a fancy California gift shop, a local food co-op, or in the corn-burning stove that heats his Mountain Lake, Minn., home.

The corn he sells to gift shops is the result of a 1990 "accident" when Friesen was cooking up an ethanol experiment on the kitchen stove. An explosion resulted in GLAD CORN A-Maizing Corn, a salty snack made of field corn, non-hydrogenated soybean oil and salt. Friesen and his wife, Gladys, patented it and started selling the product in 2002, and GLAD CORN is available in gift shops and natural food stores throughout the U.S.

Gladys recalls that they tested GLAD CORN on friends in Minnesota and then in Florida and other regions. People loved it, and after creating the demand, they sought information how to accomplish the bigger challenge of marketing.

"We took two years to do our research," Gladys says.

On a Florida trip for a financial conference, the couple discovered a niche marketing workshop and picked up some ideas. On the drive home they stopped at the production plant of the makers of pecan logs sold at Stuckey's stores.

"The wife of the man who created them, gave us a tour of the factory and gave us ideas of how they started. She was very open and generous," Gladys says.

The Friesens continued growing corn, beans and alfalfa on 500 acres while they gathered information from extension, state licensing offices and others, and remodeled a long vacant hog barn into a production facility. Stan purchased used stainless steel equipment and retrofitted it to cook up GLAD CORN.

To find supplies they needed, such as bags and labels, they visited libraries and found supply sources in Thomas Register books of businesses (www.thomasnet.com).

They sold their first cases to a local convenience store in June 1992. When they approached gift shops and chains, they were often told to go through the corporate office, something they were uncomfortable doing, Gladys notes. Then they discovered the Minneapolis Gift Mart where agents display items for gift shop buyers to choose from. That opened doors into gift stores throughout the country.

Stan and Gladys Friesen have found new markets for the corn they grow on their Minnesota farm. "The natural food market has become our niche," says Gladys.

They sell GLAD CORN to gift shops and natural food stores.

At the same time, they sold GLAD CORN in bulk to a local natural food cooperative. Now they sell the original GLAD CORN plus Jalapeno, Bar-B-Q and Gourmet Cheddar flavors, and also SOY MUNCH soy nuts throughout the country.

"The natural food market has become our niche," Gladys says. "People want to see where their food is coming from."

The Friesens attend two big food shows to meet potential distributors and have watched their business grow through the years - without taking on debt. They borrowed $3,500 from the farm account in the beginning and paid that back. Now income from GLAD CORN surpasses farm crop income. They have two full-time staff, and Stan's 93-year-old father works with four part-time employees on processing days.

"Start out small," Gladys suggests, and consider direct marketing. "What we found, when going direct, is that you get paid for the crop and eliminate middle man profits."

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New Mexico researcher says Criollo cattle may be the perfect dry climate breed for today's grass fed market.

Old Cattle Breed Finds New Niche

Old breed Criollo (cree-o-yo) cattle have been living and adapting in the deepest canyons of Mexico for hundreds of years. Ed Fredrickson thinks they may be the perfect dry climate breed for today's grass fed market. The USDA researcher is working with a herd of the animals in New Mexico, studying foraging behavior, maturity, growth and carcass quality.

"If you throw away yield grades and just look at tenderness and palatability, these animals are as good or better than Angus," says Fredrickson. "They also are easier on the range than traditional breeds because they travel more, eat a wider variety of plant material, and need less water. We're working with the Nature Conservancy to use the Criollo to improve wildlife habitat. We may be able to market them as a heritage breed for organic grass fed beef or for their wildlife and habitat restoration benefits. Or we could sell them for rodeo use."

The name Criollo is used throughout Central and South America to describe common cattle breeds descended from Spanish imports. Fredrickson's Criollo may be the oldest and purest. They're related to the Corriente, commonly used in rodeos. Both are descended from animals first brought to northern Mexico and New Mexico in 1598.

Fredrickson says the Criollo were suggested to him by Jose Rios, a Mexican animal scientist. To get the purest possible bloodlines, Fredrickson and Rios went to the bottom of the Copper Canyon in Chihuahua, Mexico.

"The canyon, which is bigger than our Grand Canyon, ranges from 400 ft. to 9,000 ft. deep. Variations within the Criollo breed have adapted to the different levels. Criollo from the lowest elevation are the largest in size. As you go up in elevation, you get animals that are smaller and better suited for colder weather.

"We hope to be able to develop a uniform cow type and then select bulls from different elevations to fit the needs of breeders," explains Fredrickson.

The animals prefer a varied diet, average only 750 lbs., and remain active at higher temperatures. The researcher compares them to goats, which can graze steeper, drier slopes.

Fredrickson will know more by next fall. He's moving heifers and steers to higher elevations in New Mexico for the summer to fatten on grass. In mid-October he plans to look at carcass data. He's confident the results will be positive.

While he is specifically developing the breed for New Mexico, he sees them as having a broader market.

"With the climate changing to hotter and drier in many areas, we need cattle that can rely on grazing under those conditions to supply regional markets," says Fredrickson. "Also, because these animals have been treated as part of the family for hundreds of years, all you need to handle them is a rope and a snubbing post. They may be ideal for small operations."

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