

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.



Newtown Graphics, based in Warrington, Penn., specializes in designing corn mazes and is known for low prices.

How To Set Up Your Own Corn Maze

A 20-year-old corn maze design business plans to expand its territory and services in 2010, without raising the low prices they are known for.

"Many of my customers are people who want to do most of the work themselves," says Don Watts, a graphic arts designer and owner of Newtown Graphics based in Warrington, Penn.

For an average price of \$1,200 to \$1,500 on a 5 to 8 acre maze, he creates the design, cuts it with a zero-turn mower when the corn is a couple feet tall and gives the customer a full-color flyer to make copies for distribution.

"I keep it inexpensive," Watts says. "I do the minimal amount of work that customers want. They maintain the maze."

The first maze Watts created was for his brother in 1989. After that other farmers asked him to design mazes for them, and his business grew. For an extra fee to cover travel expenses, his service area covers everything from Michigan to Georgia, over to the East Coast and up to Maine.

The work starts with the design. Watts finds out what the customer wants and what will work on the site. He tweaks the design until the customer is satisfied, then sets up the GPS coordinates. When the corn is tall enough, he travels to the site and cuts the design.

Watts recommends that customers call him before they plant so they know the best way to set up the field.

"We encourage customers to plant in a crisscross pattern," Watts says. "It makes the corn stronger to hold up in a strong wind." It also prevents people from straying off the path and walking between corn rows.

The graphic designer also spends a lot of time helping customers know what will work.

"Some designs are too intricate," he explains. "Cutting a maze is like drawing with a 5-ft. wide crayon on a large piece of paper."

Still, he has created impressive detail in some of his mazes, such as a Chinese dragon he designed last year. He's also created symmetrical English hedgerow patterns for customers and a variety of rural themes - tractors, animals, foods, and more.

Besides corn, Watts works with other crops, such as permanent grass mazes. He's also putting together games and puzzles to add to the maze experience.

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White corn hybrids show a lot of promise, says Bill Beckman, who has harvested the equivalent of 330 to 430 bu./acre with 85-day white corn hybrids.

White Corn Hybrids Yield Big Results

Last fall Bill Beckman harvested the equivalent of 330 to 430 bu./acre corn with 85-day white corn hybrids planted at a rate of only 25,000 plants per acre. For 10 years, he has selected inbred lines from open-pollinated corn varieties. This past season, the Minnesota professional plant breeder began testing hybrids produced from those lines. He was excited at what he found.

"They had a lot of hybrid vigor, and we were done harvesting by mid-September," he says. "One hybrid was tremendous. It stood around 10 ft. tall with huge, well positioned ears that had 14 to 16 rows of 50 kernels each."

Beckman's hybrids varied from 35 to 51 grams/100 kernels with many in the high 40's. Check plots of yellow corn averaged 19 to 30 grams/100 kernels. Using an industry formula, Beckman can extrapolate out a per acre yield from his small plots. At 40 grams per 100 kernels, the 10-ft. tall hybrid would produce 294 bu./acre at only 25,000 plants/acre. Increase the weight to 45 grams per 100 kernels and the plant population to 30,000, and yields would be 398 bu./acre.

"The starch storage in white corn is enormous compared to yellow corn," says Beckman. "I want to give farmers another crop they can plant and harvest with the same equipment. White corn is what most of the world raises. It's a food crop, but I think it has a future in ethanol production, too."

Beckman credits a friend and fellow plant breeder, the late Fred Elliot, for giving him the white corn lines. "Fred had been collecting seed from around the world for years and sent me 82 ears," says Beckman. "He had been open-pollinating them and selecting the

ones that matured. He told me to make a hybrid from them."

This coming year Beckman will be planting and harvesting 20 new hybrids produced from Elliot's early work. He plans to increase planting rates to 30,000/acre, a population rate he feels they will handle easily. He already has several farmers interested in producing parent lines for his hybrids.

"Farmers in my area of southeastern Minnesota have seen some of my plots," says Beckman. "I'll have no problem lining up a group to grow product out. If I thought the best hybrid this past year was the one to go with, we could have it on the market in about two years."

Goals for the new hybrids include 85-day maturity and maximum yield on minimal inputs. In 2009 Beckman planted on April 18th. Cold weather slowed emergence until May 5th to 7th. Even with a cool, dry summer, the plots were mature by mid-September and bone dry by October first. Most neighboring fields were too wet to harvest for another month or more. Input efficiency was equally impressive.

"The plot ground had no history of manure applications, but it was in soybeans the year before," says Beckman. "I figure I put the equivalent of 36 lbs. of nitrogen on per acre. University recommendations are about 50 lbs. of nitrogen for 50 bushels of yield, but I think my hybrids can do it on 30 lbs."

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"Carmel Corn 4 Deer"

Sweet corn growers often find it impossible to get their entire crop harvested and marketed as fresh product because of over mature or small/deformed ears. George Hubka, Dowling, Mich., wanted to recover some income from this normally wasted product, so he came up with what he calls "Carmel Corn 4 Deer." It's made by coating ears of sweet corn with molasses or caramel.

"It lets me convert normally unmarketable sweet corn into a value-added product," says Hubka, who markets the product direct to hunters and wholesales it to sporting goods stores.

Sweet corn ears are harvested and then coated with liquid molasses by dipping them into a tank. After the molasses has been

allowed to drip dry, the ears are packaged into mesh bags. A label is attached with the product name, ingredients (mature sweet corn ears and molasses), number of ears in the bag, and the producer's name and address.

"The molasses on the corn gives off an odor that really attracts deer," says Hubka, who entered the idea in this year's Farm Bureau invention contest.

An 80-count bag of "Carmel Corn 4 Deer" has a suggested retail price of \$2.99.

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