

19-Year-Old Inventor Finds Success With Greens Harvester

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

When Jonathan Dysinger started designing his Quick Cut Greens Harvester, his goal was to get himself off his hands and knees in the family market garden. Growing up reading his grandfather's FARM SHOW magazines, he knew there should be a better way to do the job. Now 19, success with his invention has him on his feet, but in a factory, not a field. Since November, he has been busy filling orders from Johnny's Seeds for the handy tool.

"They introduced it in their catalog in November, and we have been back ordered ever since," says Dysinger. "We are now making them faster than orders are coming in, but we started out behind."

Dysinger is eager to share his experiences with other FARM SHOW readers. He emphasizes the importance of having people willing to help you succeed.

One of those people is Eliot Coleman, noted author and market gardener. A few years earlier, Dysinger and his dad visited Coleman's farm in Maine. Coleman has developed multiple tools and introduced others that are now marketed nationally by Johnny's Seeds.

"We talked about the need for tools and he pointed to a bed of salad greens," recalled Dysinger. "I knew what was needed for a machine to harvest greens, and with his encouragement, I started making prototypes."

The first attempt used an old electric hedge trimmer that Dysinger took apart and rebuilt for more aggressive cutting. It was the first of several prototypes with reciprocating blades and single blades. None were simple and effective.

A bigger problem was moving greens into a catch basket. Over the next few years,

prototypes used feather dusters on a belt and brushes of various kinds. He finally designed a 14-in. dia. brush from knotted rope with tassel-like tips that push the greens across the cutting edge and into the basket.

"With the brush working, I didn't need as aggressive a blade and went back to twin blades with one reciprocating and the other stationary," says Dysinger. "I designed it to be powered by a specific battery-powered drill, but realized people would want to use their own. I redesigned it with a universal mounting system to go with the customer's drill."

Throughout the effort, he credits the help of a retired engineer, a friend of the family, with getting the prototype finished. By March 2012, Dysinger had a working prototype. He shared it with Coleman and the product manager for Johnny's Seeds. When Johnny's offered to market the harvester, Dysinger needed money to set up shop.

"Finding funding was a challenge," says Dysinger. "I whittled down the amount of tools and equipment as much as I could, but people were leery of funding it, even with a contract in hand."

Some offered to provide money, but wanted 20 percent of the business. Dysinger wanted to retain independence. A farm customer helped out. He had started a Nashville, Tenn., chapter of Slow Money, a group devoted to helping small businesses and entrepreneurs.

"He found people passionate about small farms that had money to lend," says Dysinger. "They were excited about what I was doing and were willing to lend me the money."

By the time Dysinger had the money, it was the first of October. Johnny's was going to list the harvester in their November catalog. He ordered equipment and began making parts,



Jonathan Dysinger with his Quick Cut Greens Harvester. It uses a 14-in. dia. brush with tassel-like tips to push the greens across a cutting edge and into basket.

getting 20 ready to send in November. Thanks to start-up kinks and a steep learning curve, it was February before the next 50 went out, but now production is working smoothly.

Johnny's has priced the harvester at \$495. It allows one person to harvest more than 175 lbs. of greens an hour. The 15-in. cutting head leaves a smooth cut while the brush pulls leaves back into the rear of the basket. Vertically adjustable skids ensure consistent cutting height.

Dysinger admits learning a lot about developing a product and bringing it to market in a few short years. It's a hard-won

education that he plans to continue putting into practice.

"I have more products in development," he says. "I'm working on a micro-greens attachment and different ways to use the Quick Cut for different crops. I have a list of tool ideas for farms like ours and no end of ideas. My goal is to set up a shop where I can make just about anything."

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Entrepreneurial Couple Preserves Barns With Photos

A love of barns inspired an interesting sideline business of selling prints for Tony and Sandi Winton of Glenwood, Iowa.

"On Saturdays it's what we love to do. Get a cappuccino and head out to look for barns," says Sandi, who works as a real estate agent during the week. Since 2007, she has photographed about 100 barns, with her husband helping carry equipment and setting up photo shoots. Most photos are of barns in southwest Iowa, but there are also some from eastern Iowa, one in Nebraska and one in Missouri.

"I've loved barns since I was a child," Winton explains, and she's saddened when she sees them torn down. Taking photos has become more of a mission than a moneymaker to ensure the couple's 10 grandchildren and future great-grandchildren see what the countryside was like with barns.

"We look for barns that are old, preferably 1940's and older," she explains. "We try to find ones without a lot of power lines, light poles and unattractive clutter. We like them to tell a story."

The Wintons know the story, because Tony talks to the barn owner and gets written permission before taking any photos.

"He's also the one to get past the dogs that like to greet us," Winton laughs.

She plans to publish a book with the photos and stories in the future.

Taking photos of a barn – in the morning or late afternoon – typically takes 1 to 3 hrs.

"It's not uncommon to take 500 shots of one or two barns," Winton says.

"We like to see fresh snow in the winter," she adds. "I don't like the cold. However, for these pictures the barns seem to go well with snow. My other favorite time to take pictures is in the fall, when the colors blend with, highlight and enhance the barn's color."

Her inventory of barn photos covers all seasons, and customers have different reasons for buying them. Some put the framed photos in their businesses. Some have family ties to the barn. Others – like the Wintons – just appreciate barns.

Winton has her photos professionally printed and sells them at local shops and through her website as greeting cards (\$4/each) and prints in 5 by 7 up to 30 by 40 in. with prices ranging from \$200 to \$400 for the largest sizes. Most customers order them framed by her husband or a local shop, but she also sells unframed prints.

Winton notes it takes perseverance and time to track down owners and get permission. But with an estimated 1,000 barns being torn down each year in Iowa alone, she believes it's an important mission to capture the images for future generations.

She and her husband hope to expand their mission and photograph barns beyond Iowa into other Midwest states.

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