

## He Milks Camels In Colorado

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

How long does it take to milk a camel? About 90 seconds, says Kyle Hendrix. That's the amount of time it takes the camel to devour a pound of grain and chomp down the hay Hendrix bribes her with. After that she holds her milk back, and Hendrix disconnects the milk machine. He then lets the camel's calf – which "primed" the camel before milking – finish the job.

Why would anyone want to milk a camel?

Opportunity, says Hendrix, a 27-year-old beginning farmer, who found it financially impossible to operate a traditional cattle dairy with high feed and rent costs in 2010-2011. On a trip to attend a dairy show he stopped at Passow's Camel Farm in Perry, Okla., and visited with camel breeder Ralph Passow.

With only 3,000 camels in the U.S. and growing demand from immigrants for the milk, Hendrix decided to plunge into the niche market; in addition to managing his father's 600-head beef cow herd and feedlot.

Hendrix currently has three cow/calf camel pairs and a bull.

"A lot of people thought we were crazy. It's something different and unique, but I think the market will take off," he says.

While he was the first to start a camel

dairy in Colorado, there are other camel dairies run by the Amish in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Missouri as well as a couple of dairies in California and Oklahoma.

Some people who can't tolerate cow's milk can drink camel's milk because of its lower lactose content. It's low fat, low-protein and tastes like cow's milk, only a little sweeter, Hendrix says. Health-wise, many consider just small amounts to be helpful for diabetics because of its high insulin content. Others claim its high level of nutrients and antibodies improve autism symptoms and help fight cancer and a variety of other health problems. The milk sells for as much as \$80/gal. Hendrix's camels give him 1 1/2 to 2 gal. of milk each day (in two milkings with typical dairy cow milking equipment).

Currently he sells shares (whole, half and quarter increments) for raw milk to customers in Colorado. One share is worth 4 gal. a month. Any milk not sold is used by his wife, Holly, to make soap, which is also known for its healthful properties. Hendrix's goal is to build a processing plant so he can pasteurize the milk and sell it anywhere in the country.

Developing a camel herd is challenging. Camel calves cost \$4,000 to \$8,000. The females don't breed until they are 3 or 4 years old (bulls are 5 or 6). Gestation is 13 months, and a calf must stay with its mother for her



"It's something different and unique. I think the market will take off for camel milk," says Kyle Hendrix, who recently started a camel dairy in Colorado.

to produce milk.

On the positive side, camels live 30 to 40 years.

Camels are easy keepers on brome grass hay and eat noxious weeds and cactus. By law, Hendrix fences them in with a 6-ft. perimeter fence and a second fence.

"The biggest thing is they have to be wormed every two months," he says. "But

they're easy going. You just have to treat them nice. They have a good memory. It takes me about 4 days to break them in to get them in the stall to milk them," he says.

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## New Co-Op Gears Up To Offer Non-GMO Seed

A new co-op was recently launched by Minnesota farmers to offer non-GMO seed and more. Farmers joining Genesys Grain Genetics get a total package of seed and production protocols designed for premium grain markets. Members get priority in seed selection and higher discounts than non-members.

"Our goal is to have seed raised under the same fertility program that it will be planted into," says Genesys co-founder Jeff Littrell. "The fertility program is designed to predict superior characteristics, test weight, and quality."

Littrell and his partner, Keith Schlapkohl, previously developed a crop fertility program for their farms. Later they expanded their methods into FHR, a crop fertility and nutrition company. It's the FHR fertility program that will be used in seed production for the new co-op. The FHR program produced better yields and higher quality crops but they feel confident that if the seed they used was raised with that same program, the crops would improve even more.

"We couldn't get seed providers to follow our fertilizer protocols," explains Littrell. "Genesys brings it all together."

Littrell is also dissatisfied with commercial seed that is largely derived from 5 breeding lines. Genesys has identified and is working with unique crop parent lines to develop hybrids that are different and more responsive. He and Schlapkohl partnered with Rusty Packer and Jim Nelson. Both are from Illinois, and have long been involved in the seed industry.

Littrell says they went with a co-op structure as a way to keep benefits in the hands of participating farmers. "With a co-op, you can build a company with equal benefits to a guy who raises 10 acres or 10,000," says Littrell.

The co-op's goal is to have around 300



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members with enough diversity to counter year-to-year weather concerns. "We are in our second round of the membership drive and now have members from Ohio to Nebraska," says Littrell.

Memberships are set at \$10,000 for a patron and \$25,000 if selected for an initial board of director or seed producer position. Littrell says patrons will get first access to seed and dividends projected at 6 to 7 percent after patronage is set aside.

"If we have sufficient seed beyond what members order, we will sell it outside the co-op through dealerships," says Littrell. "Patrons will also have first option on premium market contracts."

Littrell says Genesys will have more than 10,000 bags of seed corn available this year. Maturities range from 84 to 116 days.

Soybean seed has also been grown for Genesys this year with seed maturities ranging from 0.9 to 5.1.

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## Microwave Kit Lets You Extract Your Own Essential Oils

With a microwave oven and an EssenEx-100 oil distillation kit, you can extract your own essential oils in 6 to 8 min. Starting at \$125 for a basic home kit and \$180 for a complete lab kit, it pays for itself quickly considering the cost of oils. It's a smart investment for entrepreneurs who make soaps, creams and other products, and growers of crops such as lavender and mint can use the extractor to do their own lab work to determine optimum harvest times.

"Initially we created this for the home market, for do-it-yourselfers who grow small amounts of essential oil containing plants," says Bill Dean, one of the product's inventors. "As we started demonstrating our product, we found people with small acreages were able to assess the value of their crops by quickly extracting small samples for analysis."

The kit includes a mold to freeze an ice core, which condenses the vapors produced when the plant material is in the microwave. The oil/water mix collects in a beaker inside the extraction unit. When removed from the microwave the oil containing liquid is poured into a separator flask to separate oil and water. Processing 1/8 to 1/4 lbs. of plant material at a time can yield up to 3.5 grams of high-quality oil.

Most standard microwave ovens work, as long as they are big enough to hold the 7 by 7-in. extractor unit and a mug of water that is also used in the process.

The EssenEx-100 is the result of years of research for Dean and students at Oregon State University. The idea came from research for extracting oil for mint growers in the region. Using large, expensive microwave units for the process reduced emissions and extracted the oil very quickly. That led to working with standard microwave ovens and



With a microwave oven and this oil distillation kit, you can extract your own essential oils from crops such as lavender.



figuring out how to create a condenser that worked inside the oven.

After several years, hundreds of experiments and filing for a U.S. and international patent, Dean and his business partners launched the EssenEx-100 kit in 2012.

"Essential oils are a huge industry around the world, with different plants in different places," Dean says. "In Florida, for example, they have citrus crops, and oil can be distilled from the zest."

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