

His Sideline Business Is Cleaning Combines

If you're looking for a new sideline business to keep busy during the off-season, you might want to consider cleaning combines, says David Huppert of Bay City, Wis. He hauls a big diesel-powered air compressor on a trailer behind his pickup, and uses it to clean dusty combines for local farmers. He uses 3 different homemade wands measuring 2, 4 and 6 ft. long.

"I started cleaning combines as a sideline business 11 years ago, and it has grown over the years to where I now work on about 60 combines a year," says Huppert. "It's a good feeling when you leave the farmer's yard and you know that person is excited about having his combine clean again."

The big Ingersoll Rand compressor is powered by a Deere 4-cyl. diesel engine and delivers about 185 cfm's. It comes with a big rubber hose fitted with a 3/4-in. dia. copper wand and a brass valve.

"You wouldn't believe how much chaff and stalks and leaves there are on a typical combine. I try to get all of it out," says Huppert. "I ask the farmer to park the combine in an open area where I can determine the true direction of the wind, and then face the combine so the dirt blows away from me as I'm working. The compressor delivers such a high volume of

air that I hit the dirt once and it's gone. It's a noisy, dirty job so I wear ear plugs and a mask when I'm working."

He relies strictly on word of mouth to get new business. "My customers do more advertising for me than I ever could. Some people are so happy with my work that once I've finished the job, they write out a check for more than what I originally quoted."

One of his customers does a lot of custom work and owns 4 big combines. "Last year he harvested well over 8,000 acres, so his combines get dirty in a hurry. We cleaned his combines right after he finished harvesting beans and before he started on corn."

A clean combine pays because it can prevent fires and keeps mice and other rodents out, says Huppert. "My philosophy is that you want a combine clean when you put it away."

The feederhouse is one area that often gets loaded up with dirt and chaff, he says, "and no matter what color the combine, debris always collects around pulleys and behind the radiator fan. That creates a vacuum that can cause the radiator to plug solid with chaff and leaves. Any of the homemade wands I use can reach into holes the size of a soup can or smaller."

He says his high volume compressor works a lot better and faster than shop air



Hauling a big diesel-powered air compressor on a trailer behind his pickup, David Huppert cleans dusty combines for local farmers.

compressors or leaf blowers, which just don't have enough air volume.

He says it takes about 2 hrs. to clean a typical 12-row combine. "My compressor burns about 3 gal. of diesel per hour of fuel, so it takes about 6 gal. of fuel per combine."

He charges according to the size of the combine, starting at \$130 for a 6-row model and going up to about \$200 for a 12-row.

In addition to cleaning combines, Huppert also works on round and big square balers as well as self-propelled silage choppers. "Last spring I worked for a farmer who still had standing corn that he couldn't finish

harvesting the previous fall. After he finished combining he used his round baler to bale corn stalks for bedding, so he asked me to clean his combine and baler at the same time."

Huppert says he can offer the customer one more advantage. "I grew up around combines, so if I see something that's mechanically wrong while I'm working, I'll tell the customer."

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College Speech Leads To New Farm Business

When he was a student at Akron University in Ohio, Wade Mahoney had to come up with a topic in speech class. The instructor suggested he talk about alternative fuels. After researching the topic, Mahoney decided to get into the business. "The price of heating oil was going out of sight back then. So I started collecting old cooking oil from restaurants and a potato chip factory. I filtered it and sold it as heating oil."

His project went so well that demand grew from 200 gal. to more than 1,600 gal. a week. "I really couldn't expand that fast and make it work financially so I looked at other options," says Mahoney. Soon he and Dave Tegmeier, one of the owners of the farm where he works, started making food grade sunflower oil.

"We decided to start small with just 6 acres of sunflowers," says Mahoney. Today they raise about 30 acres a year on the farm. Each acre produces about 1,600 lbs. of seed that they convert into 50 gal. of oil. Their extractor produces about 12 gal. an hour, which they bottle and market under the name Sensational Sunflower Oil.

"We sell most of our product locally at a retail price of \$5.99 for a 12.7 ounce bottle," says Mahoney. "Larger containers are also available. The oil has a light and nutty taste and a high flash point, so it can be used for high temperature cooking." They're also working with a few college food service programs and are talking to a distributor about handling the product.

When he's not working on expanding

his oil business Mahoney spends time on another business venture, Sunny Side Seeds. "Sunflowers are a main ingredient in many types of bird feed that we make, and that's going real well," Wade says. So well, in fact, that Wade has to import seeds by truck and rail from a supplier in western Minnesota.

"I've been around this farm for 15 years," says Mahoney, "and I know there's no such thing as making a lot of money fast. In agriculture there are always ups and downs."

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Wade Mahoney converts sunflower seed into food grade oil, which he bottles and markets under the name Sensational Sunflower Oil.

Rare Varieties Boost Business At Farmer's Market

By Corinna Turbes

One way to attract interest at farmer's markets – and generate lots of word-of-mouth advertising – is to become known for growing rare varieties of produce. Purple tomatoes, yellow carrots, or other unusually colored or strangely shaped veggies get lots of attention.

Chris Homanics, who runs Skipley Farm near Snohomish, Wash., has taken that idea to the ultimate level by producing more than 200 varieties of apples and over 600 different varieties of potatoes.

Homanics is a self-proclaimed potato hoarder who has gathered varieties from all over the world besides breeding new strains on his farm. He started his collection in 2006 and has been able to expand it through various seed saver exchanges and by working with other

collectors. He has varieties from North and South America as well as Europe.

Maintaining the huge collection is not without its challenges, especially record keeping and storage. Meticulous labeling and accurate field notes are crucial to keeping good records. Samples of each variety are kept in paper lunch sacks with identifying information, such as variety name and physical description written on the bag. The information is also kept in an Excel spreadsheet to track performance from year to year. A special root storage room is insulated and kept at around 45 degrees. He also frequently grows out potatoes from seed.

Homanics plants about 300 of his 600 varieties each given year, taking the eye-catching produce to local markets along with his many apple varieties and other crops. The



Chris Homanics produces more than 600 different varieties of potatoes, including Santa Anna, Skigik Valley Gold, Seedling of Muru, and Peruvian Purple.

extra effort brings in customers.

If you have an unusual variety to offer to Homanics, or if you would be interested

in an exchange, contact him by email at: trixtrax@comcast.net.