

Networking Helped Build Organic Grain Sales

William Hale had his first customer before he ever planted a kernel of Bloody Butcher heirloom corn. An area artisanal baker wanted an heirloom dent corn to bake with and contacted Hale.

"I was approached because I've been involved with an organic farming organization," says Hale. "We looked at different varieties and selected Bloody Butcher. The first year I grew only half an acre or so for him to try. The baker really liked it."

Since then, Hale has added other customers and expanded product offerings. He grows 2 types of heirloom popcorn for sale locally and as seed through several seed companies. Like his Bloody Butcher, both are organic, open-pollinated varieties. Hale sells his seed through Fedco and Southern Exposure Seed Exchange.

Hale treats his product with care, using a picker to harvest. Then he hand selects ears from the wagon to shell for customers. "I farm with real inexpensive machinery,"

he says. "I have an old picker and an old F2 Gleaner combine."

Hale also grows hullless oats and Wrens Abruzzi, an heirloom rye adapted for forage use in the early 20th century. It grows 8 to 10 ft. high with heavy tillering. As with the corn, Hale has selected the rye because there was a market for it.

"It has very desirable milling qualities," says Hale. "Millers are crazy for locally produced organic grains."

Although he has 25 acres that are organically certified, Hale only plants about half that each year. The remainder is planted to cover crops.

Hale stresses the importance for anyone wanting to do niche marketing of organic products to get involved in the local or state organic organizations. It not only gives him a support system for questions he might have, it also leads to customers like his miller.

Hale continues to work closely with his miller to provide the corn he wants. When the dark red Bloody Butcher seed produced



William Hale started growing Bloody Butcher heirloom corn for an area artisanal baker. Since then, he has added other products including heirloom popcorn. Both are organic, open-pollinated varieties.

some yellowish ears, Hale began selecting and breeding them as well.

"Originally, the yellow off-type was about 5 percent of the ears produced," says Hale. "My miller likes it too, so I've been selecting and getting more yellow with each generation."

One grain that Hale grew this past year was not at the request of a customer. When he received a shipment he hadn't ordered of

white, food grade organic milo, he planted it anyway. While he didn't have a market lined up, he knew a market existed.

"I haven't tried marketing it yet, but I am looking for someone interested in a non-gluten milling grain," says Hale.

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His Hobby Is Restoring, Selling Old Stetsons

"I'm always looking for old Stetsons. I like to try and bring them back to life," says Keith Betar. The Texas ranch overseer has been around horses and worn hats all his life. He appreciates quality hats like Stetson, Resistol and Serratelli and finds satisfaction in restoring them to like-new condition. And, occasionally he adds embellishments of his own.

"It's all done by hand," Betar says, explaining he modified a carpet shampoo steamer and mixes up non-chemical solutions to thoroughly clean the hats. He brushes out dirt and stains with baking soda, vinegar and water. Once cleaned, he shapes the hats. Some hats get new feathers or a leather band, but many look as they did when purchased new.

Betar explained that new Stetsons cost anywhere from \$100 to \$5,000. The quality

rating is scored by X's on the hat's lining - the more X's the better.

He keeps some of the hats for himself and friends, and he sells others on eBay - often in the \$50 to \$75 range.

He also buys hats.

"I can tell by the lining, the band and tag how old it is," he says. He paid \$100 for a hat recently because of its age and quality. Most of the hats he buys come from people in Nevada, Texas and Arizona, but he's purchased hats from many other states as well, based on photos and information sellers provide. After cleaning and shaping them he sells them to buyers all over the U.S., as well as overseas to countries such as Great Britain.

Betar's hat-fixing hobby has led to a small side service business. With fewer Mom-and-Pop stores, hat owners have a hard time finding someone to clean and shape their hats.



Keith Betar brings old Stetson hats back to life, restoring them to like-new condition and occasionally adding embellishments of his own.

Between shipping and his time, Betar charges about \$50 for the service.

But his real passion is bringing old hats back to life for new owners who appreciate them.

"I don't want to get real fancy," he explains. "I want to get them back where they were

to what a horseman or rodeo rider would wear."

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Young Man's Honey Business Is "Hot"

When 11-year-old Henry Miller met a beekeeper on an airplane, he had no idea it would lead to developing a line of "hot" honey and appearances on television's Shark Tank, QVC and other programs. Now, at 18, the college freshman is CEO of Henry's Humdingers, a business run by him and his parents, Denise Miller and Tom Roberts in Burlington, Wash.

Miller explains that he quickly developed a passion for bees and honey production after getting his first hive. But because other beekeepers in the area were already selling honey, he and his family realized they needed to make their honey unique. They decided to sell seasoned honey.

"It was a lot of trial and error," Miller says. "Some flavors didn't work so we just went with ones that did."

Since sweet flavored honeys were already available, their first focus was hot and spicy honey blends, starting with their raw, unfiltered honey.

Grumpy Grandpa was the first blend with cayenne and garlic, and it's not too sweet and not too hot. It's great over chicken or in meatloaf. Miller says his grandpa came up

with the name for the business and the family decided to keep the quirky alliteration going with names for all their blends.

Naughty Nana blends ginger and pepper in the honey and is tasty with many veggies and pasta. Mama Drama has a smoky flavor with chipotle and cinnamon and pairs sweetly with chocolate. Diabolical Dad is Miller's favorite and the hottest honey blend with Habanero peppers and lime.

Another flavor, Hanky Panky, is a sweet blend with vanilla and nutmeg, and perfect on toast or in a fruit dip.

Many repeat customers find a flavor for recipes they like and buy bulk orders (\$8.99/13 oz. jar) to keep it on hand.

Miller appeared on Shark Tank when he was 16 and received an investment offer that later dissolved in negotiations, when the family decided to keep it a family business.

"But just being on Shark Tank gave us a ridiculous amount of publicity. We had our best year from that night," Miller says. The same thing happens when he is on QVC or other programs.

His goal is to find a big wholesale buyer or two to create consistent sales.



With help from his family, 18-year-old Henry Miller developed a line of, "hot" seasoned honey and turned it into a thriving business.

Miller and his family now buy local honey to sell through stores and through the business's website. "We're always looking to grow," Miller says.

Along with the growth, he is committed to research and helping preserve honeybees by contributing a portion of sales to the Foundation for the Preservation of Honey

Bees, Inc.

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