



CoolBot controller is now available as a turnkey unit that comes with its own cooler.



Controller comes with a ready-to-install LG window air conditioner capable of maintaining temperatures as low as 34°F.

Low-Cost CoolBot Controller Now Comes With Cooler

When Ron Kohsla first developed the CoolBot controller that attaches to a standard air conditioner, it was designed to set up do-it-yourself coolers for garden produce (Vol. 35, No. 5). More than 35,000 are now in use in 60 countries. They've been used by everyone from mortuaries to florists and even mobile trailers that bring flowers to market. Now the CoolBot is going turnkey.

"We asked users what they wanted from us, and nearly all of our 35,000 customers responded," says John Bergher, Store It Cold, manufacturer and marketer of the CoolBot. "About 20 percent said while they love their made-it-themselves system, they didn't want to do it again. As they grow their businesses, they want a turnkey solution."

So the company is now offering 6 by

6-ft., 8 by 12-ft. and 10 by 14-ft. coolers insulated to R29. They come with a ready-to-install CoolBot controller and an LG window air conditioner capable of maintaining a temperature as low as 34°F. Prices start at \$3,999 plus freight.

The Cam Lock panels are easy to install. They can be ordered ready for installation with the air conditioner in any of 3 walls, aside from the wall with the door. The doorway is designed so hinges can be installed on either side.

"The design alternatives make it easy for people installing inside a barn or other building where space is restricted," says Bergher. "The kits can be purchased with or without an insulated floor and with a weather cap and completely weatherized for outdoor installation."

Adding an insulated floor adds about \$500

to the cost of the 6 by 6-ft. cooler and about \$1,500 to the cost of a 10 by 14-ft. cooler. The cooler and refrigeration system are designed to be assembled and operating in less than an hour.

"One of the attractions of the Cam Lock system is that it can be broken down and moved as easily as it is put together," says Bergher. "That is important for customers who are renting or leasing space or considering moving at some point. They can take their cooler with them or sell it to another party. They don't have to leave it behind."

Bergher says the new cooler is a money saver over traditional purchased systems. An 8 by 8-ft. CoolBot walk-in cooler with no floor sells for \$4,599 plus shipping. He compares it to the same size traditional walk-in cooler from a leading supplier with a remote refrigeration system selling for \$6,100

plus shipping.

"Our system will use 42 percent less energy, saving hundreds of dollars a year," says Bergher. "Even the refrigeration unit can be installed by the customer. We provide excellent customer service and engineering support by phone or email."

Bergher says the company has been offering the kit for the past 4 to 5 months with only limited marketing. "We've had a tremendous response from our existing customer base," he says. "It was stronger than expected, and we already have testimonials from farmers, florists and even breweries."

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Farm Business Grows With Cage-Free Poultry

After growing up on a successful dairy farm, Aaron Brand never imagined that he'd end up running a thriving farm-to-market poultry and apple business. Brand says consumer demand for locally grown food drove his recent decision to put up a new "cage-free" barn for 2,500 chickens.

"Farmers have to adapt and change, and I've certainly had to do that as much as anyone," says Brand, who after graduating college had hoped to return to his family's dairy farm. Economics dictated otherwise. Armed with experience working on a poultry research farm during college, Brand bought 50 laying hens and began selling eggs in 2005. "Those flavorful brown eggs sold really fast to family and friends, and I realized there might be good potential," says Brand. Two years later he raised 300 hens, acquired 6 acres of apple trees adjoining his family farm, and still helped with the 70-cow dairy herd.

Brand says his egg and apple business grew steadily through sales at the farm, at farmer's markets, and to grocers and restaurants. "I didn't see myself as an egg and apple salesman, but that's what I've been doing and it's going well."

That success encouraged him to build a new poultry barn in 2016 that houses 2,500 hens now laying about 2,400 eggs a

day. "The barn has automatic waterers and feeders, is climate-controlled, and has an air exchanger for excellent ventilation," Brand says. The hens walk around, get plenty of exercise, and eat when they want. During nice days they're able to go outside to eat grass and scratch in the soil."

Brand says his flock is extremely healthy even though the birds aren't given antibiotics. Egg yields have improved in the new surroundings and the new barn saves him considerable labor in caring for the flock. The chickens eat healthy with a special GMO-free corn-based feed from his local elevator. Part-time employees help at the farm and work at farmer's markets selling many products bearing the Brand Farms name, including eggs, jams, jellies, apples and apple products such as crisps and cider.

"We're serving a market segment that's growing by leaps and bounds," says Brand. He plans to develop a larger farm store with a full commercial kitchen, using one of their older barns to raise broiler chickens and harvesting apples from the 10 acres of trees he planted last year.

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Brand Farms operates a thriving farm-to-market poultry and apple business. Their cage-free chicken barn allows chickens to go outside to eat grass.



Aaron Brand with cage-free poultry inside his new barn (above left). His chickens lay flavorful brown eggs that sell fast. Brand Farms sells many other products including apples and apple products such as crisps and cider.