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Thompson paid for the horses and a carriage using money saved from 4-H fair projects. She also uses this freight wagon to entertain groups.

## Fourth-Grade Girl Runs Draft Horse Carriage Business

Ten-year-old Shirley Jo Thompson does not like riding horses, but she knows how to drive a big pair of draft Belgian mares that weigh about a ton each. The petite driver started a business offering carriage rides for weddings, proms and events.

The Limon, Colo., fourth-grader got interested in the business after driving a pony cart and then learning about draft horses from family friends. She paid for her team and a carriage using money she had saved from 4-H fair projects. Shirley Jo sells market pigs and calves every year.

Her team, Goldilocks (now 18) and Barbie (now 16), was well-trained and gentle when they came to the Thompsons' ranch in November, 2016. Shirley Jo works with them daily and helps her

brother and sister and parents feed and care for the horses and other livestock.

With the birth of Bo, a male colt, and another colt due in March 2018, Shirley Jo plans to train them for her future team.

"Most people think draft horses are kind of scary, but once you get to know them they're not scary at all," she says. "They like getting loved on. They love to work. They really, really love to work."

And, so does Shirley Jo, who dresses up in a tuxedo, top hat, and riding skirt to match wedding colors.

"I like making people happy with my carriage," she explains. Located about an hour away from Denver and Colorado Springs, she has large population areas to market her services to.

"She's very ambitious, and she's very much the boss," adds Becky, Thompson's mother. Though she and Shirley Jo's father, Kurt, are involved with the business and help harness. Shirley Jo has her own bank account, works with QuickBooks, and figures out her fees and details for each job. The money helps pay for the draft horses' feed, and she hopes to purchase show harnesses and possibly a vis-a-vis carriage and freight wagon to add to her horse-drawn fleet.

She enjoyed helping at a threshing event, using her team to haul grain shocks to the threshing machine. She is also working with her dad to put a new hitch on a wagon so she can give her classmates a ride at the end of the school year.

Shirley Jo works regularly with her team

and understands how to stay safe when walking behind them, keeping them at arms length and keeping the reins tight when she is driving them.

It's been a learning experience for the Thompson family, and Becky is proud of her entrepreneurial daughter, who won grand champion in quarter horse and reserve champion in draft horse categories as part of 4-H at the county fair.

"My ultimate dream is to be the youngest driver of the Budweiser team," Shirley Jo says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, SJT Drafts, Shirley Jo Thompson, 13175 Co. Rd. 185, Limon, Colo. 80828 (ph 719 740-0357; Facebook – SJT Drafts).

Systems are manufactured and classes are held at Nelson and Pade, Inc. headquarters in Montello, Wis.



## Aquaponics Business Keeps On Growing

A Wisconsin aquaponics company featured in the 2013 Best of FARM SHOW has really been on the move the past 4 years. Owners Rebecca Nelson and John Pade told us that as interest in aquaponics has increased worldwide, the company has grown to meet the demand with information, training, and complete systems.

"Aquaponics is a sustainable method of food production that provides fish and vegetables in one integrated, soil-less system, while preserving resources and saving water," says Nelson.

The Nelson and Pade systems, which are designed for small family set-ups to large commercial installations, produce fish and food with virtually no waste. Fish are raised in single or multiple tanks. Water is filtered and processed to break down the nutrients, which are then used to water the plants. The plants further clean the water before it's returned to the fish tanks. Pade says running their systems requires less time to feed the fish and harvest the food than it does to prepare and enjoy a fresh vegetable and fish dinner. A small system can provide abundant vegetables and a weekly fish dinner for a family of four

with a return on investment in 3 to 4 years.

Nelson says most of their commercial installations grow leafy greens like lettuce, Swiss chard and kale. However, the one at Nelson and Pade's farm has produced many common fruits and vegetables along with bananas and papayas.

The company does self-funded research and development. They have also partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) to provide new education and research opportunities. The partnership led to a certificate program in aquaponics at the school that may soon become an aquaponics degree program.

In the past 4 years the business has added employees (now up to 25), shipped systems to 27 countries, and hosted people in workshops from 103 countries while expanding their social and education networks. Their most popular course is a 3-day hands-on Aquaponics Master Class where every aspect of running the system, from science to economics, is covered.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Nelson and Pade, Inc., P.O. Box 761, Montello, Wis. 53949 (ph 608 297-8708; www.aquaponics.com).



Three Suns Ranch traps wild hogs on their own property and also purchases them from local trappers. Hogs go straight to an on-farm processing facility.

## Wild Hog Meat Catching On In Florida

Three Suns Ranch has added wild hog meat to their ranch-raised bison and beef meat sales. Like the bison and beef, the wild hogs go straight from pasture to the Three Sun's on-farm processing. Hogs are trapped on Three Suns 16,000 acres or purchased from local trappers.

"Depending on the season, we process about 60 to 70 head per week," says Dee Sieg, Three Suns Ranch. "Everything is USDA inspected on-site."

Three Suns Ranch owner Keith Mann started the ranch in 2012, initially to sell grass fed cattle and later adding bison to the mix. When the USDA approved treating wild hogs as domestic hogs, Mann saw an opportunity and started trapping hogs on ranch property and offering to buy hogs from others. With an estimated 500,000 in the state, the supply isn't going to dry up any time soon.

"We have plenty of wild hogs in the area," says Sieg. "Most of them come from trappers operating within 100 miles of the ranch."

Originally, their on-farm processing plant

was a mobile unit. Mann strapped it down to a concrete pad and added on as the business has grown.

"It comes down to flavor and the fact that it is leaner than domestic pork," says Sieg. "Because it is so lean, we advise against cooking it at high temperatures. You want to follow instructions for cooking commercial lean pork, not heirloom hogs."

Currently Three Suns markets its products under the label RealMeats.

"We sell to consumers in Florida through our online business, but most of our meat, including the wild hog, is sold to restaurants in the state," says Sieg.

Current prices for the Florida Wild Hog meat varies from \$6 per pound for ham to \$17 per pound for the French cut, 10-rib rack.

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