

## “Big Time” Pastured Chicken Production

If you want to produce chickens on pasture in a big way fast, Featherman Equipment has you covered. Featherman founder David Shafer has put it all together. From the Prairie Schooner mobile housing to poultry processing equipment for every size producer, Shafer makes pastured poultry easier and more economical.

“I think pastured poultry is the single best way to rebuild our soils,” says Shafer. “These tools make it possible for a small farmer to increase his income and his soils.”

Shafer describes the Prairie Schooner as an over engineered greenhouse on skids. It is available in 16 by 24-ft. (\$4,313) and 20 by 40-ft. (\$5,175) models. Tarps, tow chains, bottom sealing material, chicken wire, feeders and waterers are not included.

“We use a high gauge metal and over build them for their size,” says Shafer. “They are being used for broilers and for laying hens.”

The 20 by 40-ft. model can house up to 600 broilers or 400 layers. The 16 by 24-ft. model can handle up to 300 broilers or 150 layers.

“The Prairie Schooner can move side to side or down the line onto fresh ground

once or twice a day or more,” says Shafer. “The producer doesn’t have to worry about predators, and there is less time and stress on birds than with other pastured poultry systems. You can move the Prairie Schooner in 90 secs.”

On-farm processing of 600 or more broilers is made easy and economical with the Featherman Pro Set Up. It includes the Picker, Scalding with Manual Dunker & Shackles, Small Kill Cone Stand, and 8 Broiler Cones. One person can process up to 60 birds per hour with the Set Up. Total cost is \$3,505. Other bundled kits are available with different configurations and prices.

Larger operators or groups of operators processing more than 10,000 birds a year should consider the Plant In A Box. They get a USDA approve processing plant that can handle nearly 500 birds per hour with room for 3 to 6 workers. Depending on how the system is set up, prices range from \$65,000 to \$95,000.

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Featherman Equipment says it can help make pastured poultry easier and more economical. Big Prairie Schooner mobile coops are designed for broilers and laying hens.



Featherman Pro Set Up includes a picker, scalding, small kill cone stand, and 8 broiler cones (left). Plant In A Box processing plant can handle nearly 500 birds per hour.

## Everything You Need To Grow Your Own Mushrooms

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

We received an amazing mail order catalog the other day from a company called Field & Forest. It’s full of all kinds of equipment and starter spawn for growing many different types of mushrooms.

The mail-order catalog and the company website are also packed with tips and information to help anyone become a successful mushroom producer.

“When we started, very few even knew what a shiitake mushroom was,” says Joe Krawczyk, co-founder, Field & Forest. “Now the depth and breadth of available gourmet mushrooms is amazing. The ones we offer our customers are those that are most easily cultivated. There are many more still out there.”

Krawczyk and his wife, Mary Ellen Kozak, started the company in the early 1980’s to work with shiitake mushrooms. Today they sell multiple forms of mushroom spawn (the starter material for mushrooms). Types include oyster, reishi, nameko, maitake and more. In some cases there are even different strains that fruit earlier, later, quicker, for longer periods, at different temperatures, or prefer different types of growing medium.

They also sell a wide range of equipment, from drill bits and wax daubers (for covering the inoculation site) to hand tools, power tools and high-speed automated systems to inoculate or inject spawn into logs.

Ready-to-grow kits called Table Top Farms feature 5 popular mushroom varieties. They even have kits for kids to grow gourmet oyster mushrooms on rolls of toilet paper.

Krawczyk admits the one thing they don’t sell is the patience needed by the grower. “Mushrooms aren’t a crop you can plant and expect to show up on schedule,” he says. “If you want something quick and easy, grow radishes.”

Successful growers need to understand the process of decay, he adds. Moisture management is also critical. That said, mushrooms can grow almost anywhere, although wet and humid is better than dry.

“Our climate in Wisconsin isn’t as forgiving as the South or Southeast or even

the Northeast,” says Krawczyk. “You have to be aware what the environment is doing and what you need to do to get the logs or growing medium to rot.”

Field & Forest ships product throughout much of the U.S. The one thing a grower needs locally is growing medium. In the case of shiitake mushrooms, oak, maple or ironwood logs are required. Sweetgum logs work in the South. Oyster mushrooms prefer softer hardwoods like aspen, cottonwood and willow. Oyster mushrooms can also be grown on straw.

“The cleaner and more shiny golden the straw, the better,” says Krawczyk. “Wine cap mushrooms don’t care if the straw is clean or full of weed seeds. Just soak it for 24 hrs., add the spawn, and cover it in wood chips. They are the easiest mushrooms on our list to grow.”

Once you know what growing medium you have available, Krawczyk advises picking the species, strain and spawn type that will grow on it. He recommends understanding the fungi you want to grow before ever cutting a log or preparing a growing bed. Once you choose your tools and you’ve inoculated the log or straw, you wait.

This FARM SHOW writer inoculated half a dozen 40-in. oak logs in early spring 2017 and harvested around 20 shiitake mushrooms in the spring and early summer of 2018, mostly from one log.

“That was good,” responded Krawczyk. “The others will fruit when they are ready.” That could be this fall or next year. Once they start, mushroom production will continue until the log has been consumed. A typical log will produce from 2 to 4 lbs. of shiitake mushrooms over a 4 to 8-year period.

While there is always concern the market for gourmet mushrooms could become over supplied, Krawczyk is confident there is still great potential in most areas.

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These oyster mushrooms are just one of many varieties offered by Field & Forest.



The company sells high speed automated systems to inoculate mushroom spawn into logs. Photo at right shows Shiitake mushrooms fruiting on a log medium.



Shiitake starter kit includes drill bit, inoculator, wax and applicators, spawn and ID tags for larger quantities of logs.