

Teenager Runs Successful Hatchery



Most of his hatchlings are chickens, including Cornish Cross for meat and Red Sex Links for egg production.

Sixteen-year-old Hunter Dahline's workday typically starts before dawn when he checks on his chickens. "Right now I've got them in several buildings, but I'm hoping within a few years that I can have one building to house my entire operation," says Dahline.

Dahline first took a liking to poultry when he was just 10 years old. His family always had a few laying hens so he asked his parents if he could buy some of his own. "I wanted to use my own money and try to

keep track of expenses by myself," he says. He started with just 5 hens and planned to sell the eggs for a profit. The young farmer quickly learned that selling a few eggs didn't even cover the cost of feed.

Within a year Dahline's grandparents offered support for his growing passion by giving him their old incubator, and soon Dahline's flock began to grow. He purchased larger incubators and more chicks from nearby hatcheries, sometimes at a discounted price. Today Dahline's hatchery is registered with the state of Minnesota under his name, and co-signed by his parents. The health and safety of all the birds is monitored by Minnesota Poultry Test Labs (MPTL) and National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) groups.

He raises and sells laying hens and broiler chickens, guineafowl, ducks, turkeys, geese and pheasants. The majority of his hatchlings are chickens including Cornish Cross for meat and Red Sex Links for egg production. Dahline sells his birds to retail customers and to area hatcheries. "Sometimes I can't even keep up with the demand," he says.

Business during the COVID year of 2020 has brought success. "People are buying up all the chickens they can possibly get, and I've been booked 3 mos. out," says Dahline.



Teenager Hunter Dahline raises and sells laying hens, broiler chickens, and other poultry, to retail customers and area hatcheries.

"I'm happy with it all, but it makes me a little nervous for next year," he adds. Looking ahead to 2021 he hopes to have 300 birds producing about 800 eggs per day. With all those eggs and the work load involved, Dahline has partnered with nearby farms to help house and maintain the birds. "It's great that many of these farms have young kids helping to take care of the birds, too," he says.

Dahline knows that his own work ethic is key, but he also credits the support of his parents, grandparents, and mentors from two

separate hatcheries in the area. Dahline plans to keep learning all he can about the business and continue in poultry production as he gets older. "I'm just lucky to have found my passion so young," he says. "Some people think I'm crazy, but taking care of my chickens is where my heart and values are."

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Tourism Has Been Their "Cash Crop" For 57 Years

"My parents started this business on our farm in 1962 and it has been running continuously ever since," says Mike Millar, who, along with his siblings, operates Hither Hills Campground just outside Ottawa, Ontario. Millar's mother passed away in 2020 at age 101 and kept tabs on the business right up to her death.

Millar says when his parents bought the property in 1948, it was an old limestone farm with poor crop land and decent pasture. "Early on they had a few cattle and horses, then they decided to start a campground because it was close to Ottawa," Millar says. "There weren't any facilities like this around then, and I think we're still the oldest campground in the area."

Millar says the business was successful from the start because "my parents kept the camp clean and modern and treated every guest like family friends. My siblings and I learned those lessons from helping them and we're running the business like that today."

Millar says that approach pays off with

outstanding word-of-mouth advertising and many return visitors. The business, which has had customers from around the world, also receives top marks from Good Sam, the world's largest organization for RV owners. They were recently honored with a 35-year outstanding member plaque.

"In the early 60's camping was just getting started around here, so our location close to the capital city was excellent," Millar says. "People camped in tents and small pop-up trailers that they pulled behind cars. These days they arrive in RV's behind pickups and large motorhomes. We had one rig here that I'm sure was worth more than a million dollars because it was 45 feet long and pulled an enclosed double deck trailer.

"Many people visit Ottawa, the capital of the country, because it's a scenic and historic town, and our location on Bank Street is ideal," Millar says. "We're just 12 miles from Parliament Hill and close to other attractions. We have 80 sites on semi-wooded land with 30 and 50-amp power. Each fully-



Hither Hills Campground near Ottawa, Ontario, has taken in customers from around the world since 1962. People arrive in everything from RV's behind pickups to large motorhomes.

serviced site has a picnic table and a hard surface patio. We maintain a really nice pool, clean restrooms, shower facilities and have a dog park."

Hither Hills is open from May through October and typically booked almost solid. Millar and his siblings are fluent in French and English and about 25 percent of their customers speak only French. "Our customers typically stay for a few days up to a week,

although a few stay the full 6 months. This year has been slower, because Europeans can't travel here and Americans can't drive across the border, so we hope that changes in 2021," Millar adds.

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Compost Boosts Revenue At Wisconsin Dairy

Brothers Steve and Mark Petersen generate valuable extra income from their 50-cow Wisconsin dairy herd by composting and selling manure. Mark says their all-organic product is highly sought after for top-dressing lawns and growing flowers, vegetables, and landscaping plants. They have many return customers near their 300-acre farm as well as in Green Bay and Fond du Lac. The product is also sold by Wisconsin master gardeners at plant sales. A 5-gal. bucketful sells for \$2 and bulk material is priced at \$40 a cubic yard.

The Petersens set up their composting operation by working with guidelines from Jeff Erb of the Wisconsin Extension Department. They're licensed by the state of Wisconsin. Producing the compost is labor-intensive and time consuming, but the brothers say it's definitely worth the effort. It's also safer because it keeps tractors, manure spreaders and mud off a major

highway where they're located.

Steve says composting starts about the same time as spring field work, so they spend many days working extra long hours, especially during late April and May until about the first of June. The summer compost business is quieter though it picks up in the fall until freezing.

The compost they sell is a year-old odor-free product that looks like chocolate brownie mix. They produce it in a special field where manure first dries while laying on the ground in a thin layer, then it's pushed into a windrow where a large compost turning machine mechanically agitates the manure.

The manure heats up to between 120 and 140 degrees as bacterial activity increases. They turn the row when material temperature falls to about 110 degrees. The finished compost is about half the volume of the original manure.

The Petersen dairy operation uses shredded

newspaper as cattle bedding which they produce with their bale chopper. Several local groups and individuals supply the waste paper, which Mark says goes about a third further than a similar amount of straw at about half the price. They use about 1,500 lbs. of paper a week for their operation, which costs less than a similar amount of straw.

The Petersen's compost site is on flat land protected by a filter strip of grass. Mark says producing good compost depends a lot on good weather, just like growing crops. The manure needs regular moisture, but not too much or the rows become muddy and can't be turned. Sometimes they cover rows for protection if too much rain is forecasted. Rows cure during the winter and aren't turned or disturbed, which the Petersen's say produces a higher quality product.

In addition to composting, the Petersens raise row crops with zone tilling and plant cover crops whenever possible. Both methods



The Petersens sell high quality organic compost from their 50-cow dairy herd. Manure is spread on the ground and allowed to dry, then pushed into windrows for composting.



have helped improve soil tilth and reduce soil loss to erosion.

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