

Sawmill Produces Custom Oak Staves

A southeast Minnesota company has been producing barrel staves from white oak timber for 6 decades. Jed Hammell of Staggemeyer Stave Mill in Caledonia, Minn., says that barrel staves contribute somewhere between 50 and 80 percent of the flavor and 100 percent of the color of bourbon.

Staggemeyer started sawing and marketing wine and bourbon barrel staves from white oak logs more than 60 years ago, originally in Missouri, later in eastern Iowa, and since 1958 in southeast Minnesota. Hammell says the 150 miles of timberland surrounding Caledonia continues to provide high-quality white oak logs, the preferred wood species for wine and bourbon barrels.

Staggemeyer Stave's customers include bourbon makers Jack Daniels and Seagrams along with Beringer Winery of Napa Valley, Calif.

The company cuts about 15,000 board feet of white oak lumber a day, equivalent to 4 semi-loads or about 80 to 120 logs. Its annual stave production is enough to produce 70,000 53-gal. white oak barrels.

"The bigger the oak log, the better for making quality staves," Hammell says. "Our sawmill can quarter-saw a log up to 52 in. in dia., but white oaks of that size have become few and far between," he says. "The biggest and healthiest white oaks grow out in the open or near the edge of forests and woodlots where they can soak up the most sunlight, and today's denser forests tend to favor ash, maple, dogwood and other species requiring less sun than white oak."

The barrel staves are sawn and shipped to barrel makers. All measure 39 1/2 in. long and vary in width from 2 to 6 in. Each customer then planes and bevels the staves to its exact specifications.

Wine staves sawn by the company are stored in a precise order on pallets and stored outdoors on the company's property



White oak barrel staves are made inside by Staggemeyer Stave Mill, then stored outside to weather and cure.

for 2 1/2 to 3 years. "We purposely store staves outdoors because the sun, wind, rain and snow all help to season the staves to optimize the flavor of the bourbon and wine," Hammell says. "We have one customer in Australia who even specifies their preferred stave be exposed to precisely 50 in. of precipitation."

Because every stave has to be perfect without knots and blemishes, not every part of a log can be used to make them. Logs are de-barked prior to being quarter-sawn, then sapwood and heartwood are removed. Staves with knots or mineral streaks are also discarded. "Every stave ends up getting handled by 4 or 5 workers to ensure it meets our premium standards," Hammell says. He's working at producing white oak pellets from trim material not used for staves with a goal of supplying an all-wood pellet that will be prized by food businesses and individuals who smoke meats and use wood heat for grilling.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Staggemeyer Stave Company, 18318 MN-76, Caledonia, Minn. 55921 (ph 507 724-3395; www.staggemeyerstave.com).

Missouri Farm Offers "Something For Everyone"

By Klaire Howerton

Colonial Gardens farm near Blue Springs, Mo., puts new meaning into the idea of diversity. The farm boasts a nursery, garden store, small grocery, on-site cafe, event space, orchard, berry patch, livestock farm, aquaponics system and more. Every opportunity is used to attract people to their farm to learn about rural life.

Kids and other visitors can also experience orchard tours via an antique tractor ride, opportunities to interact with livestock like chickens and alpacas, and garden center tours to explore sustainable landscaping like perennial hardscapes and swales that catch rainwater from the parking lots. Colonial Gardens also holds seasonal festivals to highlight aspects of farming and gardening; pumpkin patches, fresh-pressed apple cider, and farm-themed playground equipment are just a few of the things visitors can experience at Colonial Gardens festivals.

The garden center at Colonial Gardens features an outdoor event courtyard with a stage for live local music from April through October on Wednesdays, Thursdays and some weekends. Weddings and birthday parties can also be hosted in the courtyard, or even in the farm and orchard area.

An on-farm playground, with amenities like a splash pad, a petting zoo area, a



Kids and other visitors can visit a berry patch and enjoy many other experiences at Colonial Gardens in Missouri.

mulch pile slide, bonfire pits, and a human hamster wheel, is used during festivals and events.

Not every educational opportunity at Colonial Gardens takes place on site. The company recently partnered with one of their sister companies, PlantRight, and the Blue Springs School District to distribute kits to students that enabled them to grow vegetables at home with the help of an online course.

Contact FARM SHOW Followup, Colonial Gardens, 27610 E Wyatt Road, Blue Springs, Mo. 64104 (ph 816 229-1277; www.colonialgardenskc.com).

Rare Seed Specialists Have Unique Business Model

Truelove Seeds features unusual seed collections, like the African Diaspora, Italian, and Syrian collections.

Their website features stories about their rare seeds, like Bartram's Garden and their Yellow Carrot-Shaped Radish Seed, first collected by the Bartram family in the mid to late 1700's. Bear Bottom Farm is a mule-powered homestead in central Virginia that produces and sells Black Peanuts, Turkey Crow Beans, and Bronze Syrian Lettuce. Those just scratch the surface of a unique collaboration of growers and savers of seed from rare, open-pollinated and culturally important vegetables, herbs and flowers.

"We produce about half the seeds we sell, with the other seeds coming from almost 50 individual growers," says Owen Taylor, founder of Truelove Seeds. "Our goal is to support their work with a business model that sends 50 percent of the profits for seeds back to the farms that grew them."

Visit Taylor's website and you'll find 28 partnering farmer stories, including his own Mill Hollow Farm. He specializes in Italian heritage seeds celebrating his own ancestors, including Borlotto Lingua di Fuoco (Tongue of Fire Bean), Sicilian Rocket and Cucuzza Gourd. The latter is eaten like zucchini when 12 in. long but grows to 3 ft. or longer. The young shoots, leaves and tender fruits can all be eaten, and the fruit/gourd can be made into jam. The dry gourd keeps seeds viable for 20 years or can be used for musical instruments, birdhouses or storage containers and bowls.



Owen Taylor holding a Cucuzza gourd, one of the many rare seeds sold by Truelove Seeds.

"Our African Diaspora collection is very popular with African immigrants and African Americans. I see a lot of Italian last names on orders for the Italian Collection," says Taylor. "At the same time, people are interested in growing nutritious food, especially staples like beans, grains and vegetables."

In addition to fascinating seeds from around the world, seed descriptions are often filled with information on origin, planting, harvesting and seed keeping.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Truelove Seeds, P.O. Box 12648, Philadelphia, Penn. 19129 (trueloveseeds@gmail.com; www.trueloveseeds.com).

"Bone Hunter" Finds, Sells Antlers

For Adam Stange, the hunt for antlers started out as a hobby that turned into a family adventure that makes money. Known as the Bone Hunter, he sells, buys and trades antlers from his Livermore, Colo. home.

The business fits in nicely with something his family enjoys - hiking. His wife Chara, 3-year-old daughter Nola, and their yellow Labrador, Willow, hunt antlers with him.

Stange started searching for whitetail deer antlers when they lived in Wisconsin. The hobby expanded when he started taking trips with his brother-in-law, Craig Orth, out West in the spring to look for antlers in Montana and Wyoming on public lands and where Orth hunted.

"After we moved to Colorado, we found so many antlers we didn't know what to do with them," Stange recalls. When he posted on Craigslist, a larger buyer contacted him and offered him a job procuring antlers. Now, Stange runs his own business.

Between March and May he hikes in areas where wildlife is plentiful to look for elk and mule deer antlers, plus occasional moose and whitetail deer antlers. It's not uncommon to walk 10 to 15 miles with a special backpack that allows him to stack antlers tightly together. He or his wife carries their daughter in a backpack.

"I use binoculars. There's a lot of sitting and glassing," he says to locate the antlers.

Most of the antlers are older and end up sold for dog chews.

"If it's a fresh drop, that's what crafters want - brown and not chewed on," Stange says.

The most valuable are trophy-size or unusual antlers that collectors want. The Stanges keep the largest for their collection and sell others. Prices range from \$1 to \$15/lb. with trophies selling for more. Stange sells to pet stores, distributors and individuals



Adam Stange and family find, sell, and buy antlers from their Colorado home.

through word-of-mouth advertising. He also buys antlers.

He notes that people interested in antler hunting on public lands should check into regulations. Some areas don't allow antler hunting between Jan. 1 and May 1, to avoid putting pressure on wildlife.

"It's a lot of work. The more miles you go, the heavier the pack," Stange notes. But searching for antlers has been an opportunity for him and his family to see plenty of wildlife, including one special outing when they saw wild horses in Wyoming.

Stange invites people to contact him about buying or selling antlers.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Adam Stange, Bone Hunter, 591 Brown Bear Way, Livermore, Colo. 80536 (ph 715 613-5788; stange00@hotmail.com).