

Making A Living On A 15-Acre Farm

By Klaire Howerton

Sasha and Jimmy Rhea of Fair Grove, Mo., have launched numerous enterprises that require a lot of hustling to make a living on their 15-acre farm.

One of their most popular enterprises is a 1-acre strawberry patch, where they run both a U-pick and a pre-pick operation. When berry production is in full swing, visitors can pick their own berries straight from the patch using quart boxes provided by the farm. In addition, Sasha hires a crew of seasonal pickers who fill orders for individuals, as well as wholesale orders for area farm stands, CSA programs, restaurants and other local businesses.

This year, Rhea Farm's newest wholesale strawberry customer was a local brewery. Springfield Brewing Company used Rhea Farm's fresh berries to craft a Strawberry Cream Ale for their summer menu.

On top of strawberries, Sasha and Jimmy also have a high tunnel for garden production that they put up after receiving a grant from the Natural Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). There are many other grant opportunities for small producers through EQIP in organic farming,

energy innovations, and even forestry. Sasha and Jimmy use their tunnel to produce tomatoes, hanging baskets, and starter plants that they sell to customers through their own farm stand.

Pastured pork is another enterprise at Rhea Farm. They have a small herd of Berkshire/GOS hogs that are moved around the farm with an electric fence system. They sell pork on the hoof and with many repeat customers.

To round out their operation, the Rheas' have a flock of free range hens for eggs and they raise Freedom Ranger broilers, which is a project that Sasha particularly enjoys (www.freedomrangerhatchery.com; ph 717 964-4287). "We typically butcher around 60 a year for ourselves," she says. Her broiler flock is housed in a portable chicken tractor that is moved to fresh grass twice a day. She hopes to expand the broiler enterprise to be able to sell processed birds to their customers, along with the pork, produce and berries.

Everything on Rhea Farm is produced using organic practices - any inputs used for their berries, vegetables or plant starts, such as soil amendments or pest control, are from the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) lists, and their livestock are fed



A 1-acre strawberry patch is just one of the enterprises Sasha and Jimmy Rhea operate on their small, diversified farm. Produce grown in their high tunnel is sold at their own farm stand.

organic and non-GMO feed. Growing food organically requires a great deal of physical labor, Sasha says, but it fits a growing niche market in their area.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Rhea Farm, 1218 State Rd AA, Fair Grove, Mo. 65648 (Rhea Farm on Facebook).

Morayah Cupp rents out chickens along with 4 to 6-hen coops on wheels. Her monthly rate is \$60.



Business Takes Off For Chicken Coop Rental

Morayah Cupp started a chicken coop rental business as part of an FFA project, but it didn't take off until the COVID-19 pandemic hit. After renting out only 2 in 2019, she has 9 coops rented out this year, and all the renters plan to rent again in 2021.

"I think I could have rented out more," says Cupp, who will start her senior year in high school this fall. "Initially, I just wanted to see how receptive the community would be. This year with COVID-19 stay-at-home rules, there has been greater interest in producing your own food."

Cupp credits Rent-A-Chicken (Vol. 39, No. 5) for the idea. Headquartered in Michigan, they have placed coops and chickens from Georgia to Oregon and Texas to Minnesota. When she discovered they didn't have rentals in Nebraska, she started her own.

Cupp's 4 to 6-hen coops are distributed across a 90-mile radius, with 3 in her home county. She charges a monthly rate of \$60, which covers feed, bedding, medication, the coop itself, a feeder and waterer, and up to 4 hens. Additional hens are \$5 each per month.

"We used kits for the upper part of the

two-story coops and built the framework with wheels and a rope pull," says Cupp. "The mobile coop is designed so it can be moved around to pasture different areas, but some renters have built larger pen areas around the coops."

Cupp's rental season runs from April to November. She went with a monthly rate to allow grandparents to have the coop on hand when grandchildren came for a period in the summer. However, most of her customers are renting for the whole season.

"One of my families has 5 hens and is collecting 24 to 28 eggs a week," says Cupp. "A member of the family has a home-based baking business and uses up the eggs. Several renters have large families. Most prefer to spend their money on rent rather than buy eggs at the market."

Cupp hopes to continue her rental business through her college years. She knows she has gained valuable experience for starting some other business when she graduates.

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Greg Wierschke brings poultry processing equipment right to the farm with this 12 by 6-ft. converted horse trailer.

Mobile Poultry Processor Finds Lots Of Work

Greg Wierschke and his team take the stress and mess out of processing poultry at small farms using their mobile processor trailers. Clean Chickens and Co., out of Elk River, Minn., is in its fourth and busiest year, with more units and services that bring the processing plant to the farm.

"Our goal was 6,000 birds a year, but we already have 12,000 booked and anticipate 18,000 because of processing plant closures in the area," Wierschke says.

He started the year with a 12 by 6-ft. horse trailer he equipped to scald, clean, pluck, cool and bag poultry that is humanely butchered.

"We can do 150 chickens in a day in that unit with 3 people," he explains. Customers just need to provide water and power, and have the birds penned up.

About half of the jobs (50 birds minimum) are for folks raising chickens for themselves. The rest are for growers who sell processed birds at farmers markets or off the farm.

This year, to serve growers interested in selling to stores and restaurants, Wierschke equipped a 36-ft. enclosed trailer to meet USDA requirements. It is large enough for up to 5 workers to process nearly 400 birds a day, and he can also take the trailer across state lines.

For folks with fewer than 50 birds, he rents a DIY trailer with all the equipment to make it easier for them to process their own birds.



"Our goal was 6,000 birds a year, but we already have 12,000 booked," says Wierschke.

Or they can just rent a plucker.

Customers appreciate the time and hassle they save by having a mobile unit come to them versus loading up and spending time to take the birds to a plant. Clean Chickens' prices start at \$5/chicken. They travel up to 50 miles from Elk River for free and add a surcharge after that.

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