

If you're looking for new ways to add to your bottom line, take a look at the money-making ideas featured here and on the next page.

If you've found or heard about a new income-boosting idea, we'd like to hear about it. Send details to: FARM SHOW Magazine, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 800-834-9665) or email us at: editor@farmshow.com.

As Hintz has gotten older, he's less eager to crawl under the balers himself. Now, he frequently brings a friend along to help with the repair or explains the fixing process as the owner completes the steps themselves.



He's Still Fixing Balers At 91

At 91 years old Lewis Hintz has earned a reputation throughout eastern Wisconsin for his mechanical skills. He's one of the few people in the region who knows how to fix small square balers.

Hintz started working with balers back in 1955 when he used a Deere 70 tractor pulling a 14T square baler. "I baled hay all over the neighborhood back then," says Hintz. "Using this equipment took a lot of fixing. The more I fixed, the more I learned."

He started receiving requests from others to fix their balers in the 1960's. Word quickly got out about Hintz's skills, and he was soon traveling in about a 50-mile radius to perform repairs.

These days, small balers have fallen out of fashion in favor of industrial-scale equipment. But Hintz stays busy every summer and estimates he averages two repairs per week over the farming season. All his tools stay packed in his car so he's ready to go whenever a request comes.

As Hintz has gotten older, he's less eager to crawl under the balers himself. Now, he frequently brings a friend along to help with the repair or explains the fixing process as the owner completes the steps themselves. This serves a second purpose - it helps ensure the baler owner learns how to maintain their equipment. Says Hintz, "A lot of places I go, I don't ever have to go again because they learned how to do it themselves."

At his age, fixing these balers has become more of a passion project than a business. Says Hintz, "I have lots of friends and relatives whom I don't charge. They always pay me back somehow, even if it's not with money."

Looking forward, Hintz hopes to continue working on farm equipment for as long as he is able. "I enjoy what I'm doing. I've loved my life as a farmer and love to help others whenever I can."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Lewis Hintz, 8604 Liberty School Road, Omro, Wisc. 54963 (ptreu1963@gmail.com).

Auction A Great Way To Buy, Sell Produce

Dave DeBuchananne is a big fan of produce auctions to sell his excess produce, but he also goes to them to buy what he needs. DeBuchananne sells asparagus and rhubarb at his local auction in Michigan but has made a hobby out of attending auctions held elsewhere.

"I've always been intrigued by the produce auctions that have sprung up across the country," says DeBuchananne. "They can be found in much of the Midwest, as well as to the south and east. They are a great way for a small grower to access the wholesale market."

DeBuchananne explains that while many produce auctions are operated by Amish or Mennonite communities, they are generally open to all. There is generally a commission fee on sales and often a transaction fee as well. Most require produce to be packed in standardized containers and meet cleanliness standards.

"Usually there is a pole building where you back up and unload your boxes or bins on a pallet," says DeBuchananne. "After everything has been tagged and the auction starts, an auctioneer moves down the row of pallets. The auctioneer often decides if produce should be sold by a minimum number of packages or all at once."



The auctioneer often decides if produce should be sold by a minimum number of packages or all at once.

Payment usually comes within a few days or within the week, adds DeBuchananne.

"The produce markets are a great place for buyers to find quantities they can't get at the farmer's market, whether for resale or home canning," says DeBuchananne.

Whether interested in selling or buying at an auction, DeBuchananne suggests starting with an internet search. Enter "produce auction" in the search field and it'll likely bring up a map with markers for dozens of produce auctions. They stretch from Florida to central Wisconsin and from near Kansas City to Virginia and north to Bangor, N.Y. on the Canadian border.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dave DeBuchananne, 10295 E. Muskrat Rd., Carson City, Mich. 48811 (debuchanne@cmsinter.net).

Growing The World's Most Expensive Spice

Saffron is commonly grown throughout Africa, the Middle East, and central Asia. However, some North American farmers have started growing saffron as a cash crop.

The world's most expensive spice has a lot of appeal. Beyond adding a subtle flavor to food, studies have shown that saffron may work for boosting your mood, treating depression, reducing blood pressure, lowering cholesterol, and potentially alleviating the symptoms of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Saffron flowers are tiny purple crocuses with three red stigmas in the center, the part that makes the spice. It takes over 170,000 flowers to produce a pound of saffron, making it worth well over its weight in gold.

Under ideal conditions, 1 acre of saffron flowers will yield an average of 4 lbs. of the spice, for a total revenue of \$40,000. But even so, this subtly sweet spice is challenging to profit from because of the labor and land required.

U.S. farmers have grown saffron on a small scale since the 17th century when the Pennsylvania Dutch first brought over the bulbs. Recently, commercial interest in the spice has renewed, due in part to a viability study in New England from 2017 to 2019. In it, researchers from the University of Rhode Island experimented with different planting densities to determine their effect on pistil dry weight (the valuable part of each stigma).

The results showed that planting density didn't affect the number of flowers or total yields but that the low-density plots produced larger stigmas. Further research revealed that winter protection made little difference in overall production, despite the flower's reputation as a warm-weather species.

The hardy plant thrives in sandy to loamy soils and requires good drainage to avoid rot. It can adapt to growing USDA zones 6 through 10, so long as the flowers are grown in direct sunlight. Those below zone 6 will need to dig up the bulbs for winter storage.

The flowers themselves are best harvested in the morning on a dry day approximately



Under ideal conditions, 1 acre of saffron flowers will yield an average of 4 lbs. of the spice, for a total revenue of up to \$40,000.

6 to 8 weeks after planting. Wait until the blooms are partially open and gently pick out the stigma with tweezers. The blooms will degrade quickly in direct sunlight, so they must be stored immediately in a shaded area.

It's possible to use the saffron threads right after picking, but they are most often dried for long-term storage. An open shelf can work, as will a dehydrator.

The plant itself has few insect and disease problems and requires minimal inputs, making it ideal for organic production. And unlike many organic crops, the plant does well in long-term storage.

The pain point for producing this high-value crop is harvesting. There's no way to gather the blossoms mechanically, making it an extremely labor-intensive process that's hard to support in the U.S. Growing saffron as a primary crop may not be profitable in most U.S. production systems, but it offers potential for small-scale growers or as part of a mixed farming operation.

Phone App Helps Find Farm Help

Growing up on a Missouri farm, Kevin Johansen says that his dad and neighbors didn't have much trouble locating someone to help them during busy seasons. "There were usually retired farmers in town or young people who wanted to earn extra cash, and the help would arrive with a phone call," Johansen says.

"These days it's tough to find extra help when you need it, so that's why we created AgButler, a phone app that lets a farmer, rancher or ag business locate help for a few hours, a day, or more," Johansen says. The app connects people who need help with available workers who are filtered by location, ratings, work experience and availability. "Better yet, it's all done with a secure payment structure that's organized in the app," Johansen adds.

The operation needing help fills out an employer profile on the app, describing the type of help needed. A job profile is also created. Laborers who register on the app fill out their work experience, the equipment they can operate, if they're proficient around livestock, when they're available, and how far they're willing to travel. A phone call, e-mail or text connects the two parties when jobs are posted.



AgButler is similar to a ride-sharing app in that it connects people who need help with available workers who are filtered by location, ratings, work experience and availability.

Johansen is a 5th generation farmer who worked his way through college helping farmers and ranchers. The AgButler app was born and soon after named a semi-finalist in the American Farm Bureau's 2020 Ag Innovation Challenge. That award earned a Missouri Ag grant to further develop the concept, which has helped Johansen and his team develop the Collegiate Ambassador Program. The program will select 10 participants to each receive a \$500 scholarship to help connect laborers and employers using their own network of friends and acquaintances.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, AgButler (ph 417-812-6080; www.agbutlerapp.org).